WILDERSMOOR

C. L. ANTROBUS

FIDUCIA

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WILDERSMOOR.

VOL. I.

WILDERSMOOR

A Novel

By C. L. ANTROBUS

"Let both grow together until the harvest."—Matt. xiii. 30.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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To my Cousin

ALICE HANSLIP,

WHO,

THOUGH A RELATION,

IS YET A FRIEND;

This Book is Dedicated

WITH THE DEEPEST GRATITUDE AND AFFECTION.

WILDERSMOOR.

CHAPTER I.

A GREY rugged hill was Wildersmoor Pike, overlooking, like a grim sentinel, the wild moorland that trended westward to the sea. A weird ghostly tract of country, where mists lay hidden all day in the marsh pools, and rose and coiled at night; where moss grew deep and velvety, and luxuriant fern waved and bent in the strong west winds that swept up from the sea over the sandhills and across the moor.

A strangely silent place. The hum of insects, the rush of the wind, the scream of the curlew: these were the sounds of Wildersmoor.

Eastward the Pike looked down upon another and a different scene, the manufacturing town of Woffendale; a grimy hive of men, of blazing furnaces, of chimneys pouring out volumes of dense black smoke that hung like a dun pall in the atmosphere. A west wind blowing off Wildersmoor rolled the smoke away inland. An east wind swept it seawards across the moor, dimming the pale blue northern sky—the pale northern sunshine. But the rush and roar of the town were as far away as though an ocean divided it from that home of the curlew and the mist. Neither whirr of spindle nor thunderous beat of engine reached the silence of that lonely moorland. On this cold grey December afternoon, the mists that lurked in the moorland pools

floated upwards as twilight fell, spreading their wan folds far and wide over the landscape like a ghostly mantle. The Pike loomed dimly, a vast formless shadow, through the fog that rolled up so softly, so silently. Even the ruddy firelight that streamed cheerily from the windows of Wildersmoor Hall lost itself in the white vapour before it reached the pines by the gates.

Wildersmoor was crossed and recrossed by many paths that wound past rush-fringed pools and treacherous patches of marshy ground; paths easy to traverse by daylight, easy, too, at night, to those accustomed to the moor, those to whose eyes each heap of withered fern, each clump of gorse or bramble or stunted willow, was a familiar landmark. But to the stranger, Wildersmoor without light of day or stars was a death-trap; and in a dense fog such as was now veiling everything it was dangerous

even to those dwelling on it from childhood.

Save to one. There was one man in the district who, by reason of his affliction, could wander about the moor as easily in the blackest night as in brilliant sunshine. An elderly man, strong and hearty, known as "Blind John o' Wildersmoor." His surname had been so long unused that it was well-nigh forgotten. He earned his living by carrying parcels to and from the station. A cheap and trustworthy messenger was a convenience appreciated in that part of the world, where farms were wide apart and housewives busy. Very often the modest sixpence which he demanded, no matter how short or how far the distance, would be supplemented by a gift of food or clothing. He lived in one of a row of cottages near the Hall, and old Granny Darlow, his next door neighbour, cooked his meals and "redded up" for him in consider-

ation of a small sum paid every Saturday night.

Despite his infirmity, Blind John knew by the voice—nay, by the footstep—every man, woman, and child for miles round; never failing to address them by name when accosted. He knew, too, all the gossip of the neighbourhood and retailed it with zest, sitting over his pipe and beer in the little sanded parlour known as "th' Snug," behind the bar of the Grey Wolf, the only inn in the district.

To his regular customers he was as good as—in fact, better than a newspaper. For what did the dwellers of Wildersmoor care about the doings of the great world? Their world was bounded by Woffendale on the one hand and the grey restless sea on the other. All else was "foreign parts." Blind John told them exactly what they wished to know — viz., their neighbours' affairs. Nothing else mattered. So the tap-tap of

his guiding-stick was far more interesting on Wildersmoor than the postman's knock.

This dark December evening that same stick went tap-tapping on the frozen ground along a fairly wide path that led across the moor to the north-west. The fog was so thick that it felt like a damp blanket to the face, and to distinguish surrounding objects was impossible. But Blind John went on at his usual slow steady pace; to him darkness and light were alike. He carried a large parcel, and was on his way to a distant farm where he was tolerably sure of a good supper; and he further reflected that on his return home he could spend the remainder of the evening at the Grey Wolf, thus satisfactorily concluding the day.

He had gone, perhaps, a quarter of the distance he had to traverse, the heavy tramp of his iron-bound clogs and the light tapping of his stick sounding hollow on the hard ground, when he heard other footsteps

behind him. He stopped and listened. His keen ears told him the approaching stranger wore boots—not clogs, and the step was unfamiliar.

"A mon—an' quick on th' feet—an' wi' boots," he muttered. "I conna tell whoever it mun be."

And turning his head he challenged his unseen companion:

"Who's that theer?"

"What's that to you?" came sharply from the fog.

"Eh, mon!—tha needna freshen up so! Tha' mun ha' getten too mooch beer i' thee. Most folk 'ud be glad enow to happen o' Blind John i' a fog on Wildersmoor."

"Are you blind?" the voice was friendly now; a singularly melodious voice, sweet and ringing. "Can you guide me to North Rode station? I have lost my way in this infernal fog."

"I reckon thou hast," with a chuckle of

satisfaction. "Most folk 'ud be lost but me. Ay, I con guide thee well enow. North Rode, did tha say? Then tha wants to go to Riverton, belike?"

"Now what does that matter?" The tone was half-amused, half-impatient.

"Eh, dear!—up again! Mester, tha'll ha' to be a rare hond at punsin' if tha means to go through th' world talking to folk like that. Sithee, I allus charge a shilling fur guiding folk in a fog."

"I will give you five. Push on!"

"Nay,—nay. If I pushed on, as tha calls it, I'd push th' two on us into th' nighest pond, I'm thinking. I mun go my own pace, mester."

"Will not five shillings hurry you up?" with a laugh.

"Nay, nor fifty. What 'ud be th' good o' th' brass if I wur sticking head down i' one o' them bog-holes? Mester, tha's getten no more head-filling nor a babe."

"All right."

The stranger did not seem inclined to enter into conversation, but Blind John had never held his peace in his life, and was not likely to do so on the present occasion. He wanted to know who he was guiding, and therefore began talking in a manner calculated to lead round to the subject of his companion's identity.

"Wildersmoor's a foine place fur fogs," he observed, complacently. "There's nowt like 'em i' a' Lancashire. I've heard as theer's rare uns i' Lunnon, an' th' Queen dunnot like 'em. Eh! if hoo'd coom down here I'll warrant hoo'd see summat i' fogs as 'ud make Lunnon nowt. Dost tha know Wildersmoor, mester?"

"No."

"I thowt tha didna, or tha'd ha' bethowt thee afore tha'd ha' set foot on it to-neet. Happen tha'rt fro' Woffendale?"

"No."

"I know a many o' th' Woffendale folk. Theer's owd Elkanah Fleming o' th' Atlas Works. I mind him these forty year an' more. Ay, an' his son, too, Mr. Ralph. An' theer's Mr. Quentin, brother's son to owd Elkanah. Eh, everybody likes Mr. Quentin. He lives o'er at th' Hall; his folk allus lived theer. 'How art tha, John?' he says, wi' a slap betwixt th' shoulders as 'ud almost jolt the Pike! He's a foine young chap, is Mr. Quentin. Happen tha knows him, mester, if tha belongs to these parts?"

"I don't belong to these parts," absently.

"Riverton is nowt much o' a town, I've heard," pursued John, taking up a fresh scent. "It's noan place fur a mon to start in if he wants to make brass. But belike tha hasna been theer long?"

No answer to this.

"An' theer isna many trains as stop at North Rode fur Riverton. Tha sees, folk dunnot want to go theer. I know'd a chap

as coom fro' Scotland an' lived at Riverton fur a spell. But he told me he couldna stond it, it wur that dull. So he made a flitting to Woffendale. He wur allus talking o' Scotland, saying it wur summat grand."

"It may be. I do not know."

John tried another trail.

"Eh, but this fog's a thick un! I wonder what them Lunnon fogs is like. Did tha ever see one, mester?"

"Two or three."

"Did tha?" in the tone of one who has at last arrived at something definite. "I reckon they wurna like this?"

"No."

"I thowt not. But I make no doubt as Lunnon's a foine place."

No answer.

"I dunnot know as I ever see a Lunnoner afore, if so be as tha's a Lunnoner born an' bred," continued John, using, as he

always did, the phraseology of those blessed with sight. "Tha dunnot talk mooch, mester."

"Don't I? Well, I am not sure that talking ever does any good."

This reply aroused the argumentative Lancashire spirit.

"I dunno so mooch about that. Sithee, what's public opinion but talking? If theer wurna talking theer'd be no public opinion. Art tha going to turn up thy nose at public opinion? Eh, mester, tha's getten howd o' th' wrong end o' th' stick this toime."

The stranger laughed again. A pleasant laugh, but it ruffled John.

"Ay, but tha has, I tell thee, an' tha conna deny it. Look at th' papers—a' gossip! I conna read 'em mysen, but I con hear other folk read 'em. I often hear bits o' th' *Woffendale Star*, an' theer's a mort o' news in it. Would tha do away wi' papers, an' ha' folk howd their tongues fur a' th' world like th' dumb beasts?

I reckon th' Almighty meant folk to talk, else we couldna do it—theer!"

No comment from the stranger.

"I see tha's getten nowt to say," observed John with a chuckle. "When it cooms to argyment, mester, tha dunnot seem mooch o' a hond at it. That's th' way wi' a many. They're sharp enow at contradicting, but when a mon tackles 'em—eh, dear! they shut up as tight as a rat-trap. Theer's th' station reet afore thee. Dost tha see th' signal lights?"

"Yes, I see them, thank you. Here are the five shillings."

"I'm mooch obliged. Tha con coom this way again i' a fog as soon as tha pleases. I'll be glad to guide thee. I shall know thee quick enow."

"Know me?" said the stranger, in tones of surprise, stopping in the act of turning away.

"Ay, to be sure, Why not? Dost

tha think that because I conna see I conna tell one mon fro' another? I'll warrant I'd know thy voice anywheres."

"Well, good-night! and good luck to our next meeting."

The unknown walked away towards the signal lights. Blind John resumed his journey to the farm, shaking his head now and then in a manner that indicated grave disapproval of his late companion.

He duly arrived at the farm, received his sixpence and the supper he had anticipated, and set off homewards in a serene and comfortable frame of mind.

"Theer'll be toime fur half an hour at th' Wolf," he muttered to himself as he plodded unerringly through the fog; past deep pools, past treacherous patches of trembling bog, where a yard to left or right would have plunged him in without hope of succour. He had nearly reached home, had turned into the track leading off the

moor, and past the little inn to Wildersmoor station, when his guiding stick struck against something soft. He stopped. Then touched it again with his stick.

"I conna make out," he said, and stooping, passed his hand cautiously over the object lying in front of him. "It's a mon! He mun be drunk. He's getten a great-coat, an a good un. He mun be a gentleman. His hat's gone. Ay, an' he's getten curly hair, an' it's wet," feeling carefully, "wet wi summat sticky. Eh, dear, happen it's blood! He's hurt hissen i' falling." John straightened himself and pondered a moment. The innate caution of the blind made him slow in deciding upon a course of action.

"I'll go on to th' Wolf. Ay, that'll be best."

And stepping over the prostrate form he plodded onwards. In ten minutes he passed under the swinging sign, whereon

some bygone local artist had depicted a shaggy animal, pale of hue and terrific of aspect, into the cheerful blaze of a mighty fire—a real north-country fire, filling the huge grate and roaring half-way up the chimney. The landlord, Matthew Vose, was dispensing "sixpenny" to several customers, and greeted John as he entered—

"Well, owd lad, I thought it wur about toime fur thee to drop in. Theer's a seat fur thee in th' Snug," jerking his thumb towards the parlour behind the bar.

"Thank ye, but I conna set in it yet. Some on you mun coom wi' me. Theer's a mon lying on th' road nigh here. He's drunk or summat. I felt his head an' it wur wet. Look at my hond." And he held it out.

"Eh, mon!" ejaculated the landlord, snatching up an oil lamp and holding it near, "it's blood!"

"I thowt so," returned John com-

placently. "It isna often as I'm mistook in owt."

"Let's ha' a look," said another man. "Ay, th' chap mun ha' struck again summat in falling. It's lucky tha stumbled o'er him. This is noan the neet to be lying on Wildersmoor."

Here Vose, followed by three or four men, reappeared from the Snug, where he had been relating the news.

"These chaps is coming," he said, "are you fellys coming too? William," to a lad who was part ostler, part pot-boy, "bring along them two lanterns, an' fetch th' short ladder. It'll do to carry him on."

The party sallied out, Blind John leading. Their progress was necessarily slow, by reason of the fog and their being obliged to follow John's deliberate steps.

"This here's a frosty un," remarked one, alluding to the mist. "Th' rime'll be as thick as snow to-morrow."

"Ay, lad, tha'rt reet. We're getten on th' moor now." It was the landlord who spoke. "Is it fur, John?"

"Nay, tha'll be alongside o' th' chap in a minute."

More silent trudging, then John halted. "Theer he is!"

The others crowded round, William and the landlord throwing the light of the lanterns on the pallid face.

"Eh, it's Mr. Ralph Fleming!" exclaimed the lad. And Vose echoed in consternation,

"Ay, it is, an' I'm feart he's dead. Chaps, this here's a bad business."

"Mr. Ralph!" repeated Blind John. "Art tha sure he's dead? Happen he's only knocked hissen dazed-like."

"He's dead for sure. An' look at th' crack he's getten on his head," said another. "He never could ha' done that hissen! Theer's nowt to hit agen. Hond o'er one

o' them lanterns an' I'll glimpse round a bit."

"Tha'll lose thysen, tha fool!" remarked a friend, warningly.

"Nay, I willna. I'm noan going but a yard off."

He groped about while the others lifted Ralph Fleming and laid him on the ladder they had brought. Not an easy task; all the Flemings were tall and heavy men.

"Chaps!" cried the searcher, "I've found th' stick as did it, an' it's Mr. Ralph's own. I con see 'R. F.' on it."

He held in the light of the lanterns a strong cane, the loaded end stained with blood. Vose examined it closely.

"Ay," he said, drawing a long breath, "it's murder! That's what it is."

"It's easy to see how it wur done," observed the finder of the cane. "Th' felly mun ha' snatched yon stick and throw'd it down when he run off."

"An' I con tell thee th' mon as did it," said Blind John, suddenly. He had been a silent and attentive listener. "As I wur going o'er the moor to th' Moss Farm to-neet, a chap coom up wi' me. He wur noan so civil till he found I wur blind, when he asked me to take him to North Rode station, an' I did, an' he give me five shilling. He wur a close chap. He wouldna say who he wur, nor wheer he wur bred, nor owt. But he wur a stranger, an' he owned up as he coom fro' Lunnon."

"Would tha know him again, John?"

"Ay, anywheer. Th' impident nowt! he wur wishing good luck to our next meeting. I reckon it willna be a lucky meeting fur him! He'd a voice I'd know again in a minute. It wurna a bad sort o' voice," added John, grudgingly, as the remembrance of those laughing, musical tones rose on his mind. "He wur young—I'm sure o' that. An' he wur in a rare hurry."

"Belike he wur," said Vose. "It's like enow a mon 'ud be in a hurry when he's getting out o' th' way o' the hangman! Th' Woffendale police ought to know o' this. See here, we mun take Mr. Ralph to th' Hall. Happen he wur going theer. Mr. Quentin will know what to do. He'll ha' a noice job to tell owd Elkanah o' this—ay, he will that!"

"I dunno as th' owd chap 'll take it to heart o'er mooch," said another man. "Mr. Ralph wur a bit o' a wastrel, tha knows."

"That's true enow, an' I conna say I liked un myself. But wastrel or no wastrel, a mon dunnot like his son knocked on th' head in a fog. I'll warrant owd Elkanah 'll pretty nigh raise a' Woffendale. Heave up th' ladder, lads. Lead on, John."

CHAPTER II.

WILDERSMOOR HALL was an old many-gabled ivy-covered building, roomy and comfortable, with latticed windows and dark oaken floors. It stood on the lower slope of the Pike, where the ground rose from the moorland. In front of the house, within the curve of the drive, was a lawn—mossy as lawns only can be on the western coast; and on either side of it and across the end by the gates, a double row of pines stood darkly against the sky. They were in perfect harmony with the old house and the wild moor they faced.

In summer and in winter—whether warm breezes rustled and whispered through their branches, or bitter winds wailed and whistled round them, always the same. Not that there was anything gloomy about the trees, but rather an idea of cheerful friendliness. When all else was withered and bare, the pines' warm red trunks and blue-green foliage gave to the wild landscape the one touch of colour that it needed.

The drive, after circling the lawn, went round to the back of the house through the grounds, finally joining a wide wheel-track that led from the moor to the high-road. Where the track merged into the road stood the little wayside station of Wildersmoor. The station, the inn, a few cottages, and one or two farms, were the only habitations nearer than North Rode. The Flemings—a branch of the Cumberland Flemings—had lived for generations

at Wildersmoor Hall. The present owner, Quentin Fleming, was a young man, not yet thirty. His late father and his uncle Elkanah were the firm of Fleming and Fleming, of the Atlas Ironworks in Woffendale; and on the death of the elder Fleming, Quentin inherited a large fortune and also succeeded to his father's position as partner in the firm. The third member of the Fleming family was Ralph, son of Elkanah and cousin to Quentin. Most people looked askance at Ralph Fleming, and with reason; and old Elkanah's rage and disappointment culminated about every six months in a sharp quarrel between father and son, the father having a violent temper and the son possessing every other bad quality in addition. Ralph's mother—like his cousin's—having died years ago, there was no one to smooth matters except Quentin, who had, however, generally managed to patch

up a hollow truce between the belligerents. But of late Ralph had become so oblivious of everything save his own evil ways that the cousins had drawn apart. In truth, there was a deeper gulf between Quentin, who was the soul of honour, and Ralph, who was totally ignorant of what honour meant, than between Elkanah and his son.

"A pity the lads cannot be shaken up together," old Elkanah would grumble occasionally. "A little of the starch taken out of Quentin, and a trifle of it added to Ralph, and we'd get along firstrate. If anything went wrong with the Works, my nephew would pay up every penny owing if he had to go barefoot to do it. And my son would scrape up all the cash he could lay his hands on and lose the whole in ten minutes betting. And I'll be shot if I know which would be the bigger fool!"

From this speech a stranger might have

formed a tolerably accurate diagnosis of the characters of all three men. But now, Ralph was dead on Wildersmoor, and his bearers were carrying him through the white fog to the Hall, where Quentin sat thinking darkly of their last quarrel. While in Woffendale, old Elkanah was entertaining at dinner a few of his ancient cronies, and consulting them as to how he should make his will so that Ralph should inherit a fortune and a share of the business, yet not be able to squander the one or ruin the other: a problem that had kept his lawyer hard at work for the last eighteen months, as no document he had hitherto compiled entirely satisfied the old man.

When Matthew Vose and his party reached the Hall gates, the landlord stopped:

"Howd on a minute, lads. I reckon I'd best go in an' break it like."

The men halted beneath the pines while Vose, taking a lantern, groped his way along the drive to the door.

"Is Mr. Fleming in?" he asked of the servant. But as he spoke, Quentin himself came out of the library.

"If you cross Scot and Norse," said Gilbert of Ghent, "you get a very big man." Doubtless Quentin Fleming's mingled northern ancestry accounted for his height and breadth. He was a very big man, fair and sunburnt, with closely cropped fair hair and dark grey eyes that at night appeared almost black. They were kindly eyes, too, that smiled with the mouth, whose pleasant curves were hidden under a heavy fair moustache.

"What is it, Vose?" he asked, seeing the landlord standing in the doorway, the white fog eddying past him into the hall in pale coiling wreaths.

"Well, sir, it's Mr. Ralph. He has

met with an accident, or worse. Blind John found him lying on th' moor."

"An accident?" repeated Quentin. "Is he badly hurt? Where is he?"

"We've getten him here," with a backward jerk of his thumb towards the gates. "I'm feart, sir, that it's a bad business. It's all o'er with Mr. Ralph. Theer's a crack on his head that has let out the soul, sure enow."

Quentin uttered an exclamation and hurried out, followed by Vose, who threw the light of a lantern on the dead man's face as his cousin bent over him.

Those of the men who were not holding the ladder drew back respectfully, but after that one horror-struck exclamation Fleming said no more either of horror or regret.

He directed the bearers to carry Ralph into the library, and wrote out a telegram, telling the groom to get a lantern and take the message to the station: "It is

just possible he may not be dead. This must go to Dr. McKie at once. There is no one nearer."

"Theer's the vet," suggested a bearer in a hoarse whisper, nudging Vose. "He's a graidly hond at doctoring hosses. Happen he'd be better than nowt?"

Vose shook his head.

"It's all o'er," he replied in a low tone. Then aloud to Fleming,

"Blind John 'll take that telegram quickest, sir, slow though he be; for this fog is like a blanket afore a mon's eyes."

"True. Is John here?"

He was standing in the hall in his usual attitude of patient waiting, holding his stick before him, listening intently to all that went on.

"I thowt I might be wanted again," he observed when Quentin addressed him, "fur theer never wur a worse fog nor this.

Ay, I'll go o'er to th' station an' anywheer else. Eh, dear!—but whatten a job, Mr. Quentin!—whatten a job!"

"Yes."

"Vose 'll tell thee about th' chap as I led o'er to North Rode," continued John, as he tapped his way down the steps into the chill night air. "Eh, if I'd ha' known I'd ha' led him safe to th' police, fur it wur him as did it, sure enow."

The rest of the men, receiving Quentin's thanks with deprecatory murmurs of "Eh, sir, it's nowt!"—filed out after John and took their way back to the inn, groping cautiously along with the aid of a lantern.

"If we arena there when tha cooms, John, tha mun start out an' look fur us!"

"Ay—ay," came from that part of the fog wherein John had disappeared.

Vose had remained in obedience to a sign from Fleming.

"I'm afraid, sir, theer 'll be naught to be done. Mr. Ralph is gone."

Quentin turned away with a groan and leant his elbow on the mantelpiece.

For a moment there was silence in the room, save for the crackling of the fire and the low ticking of the clock. Vose felt surprised that Ralph Fleming's death should so affect his cousin, for as the landlord afterwards remarked, "It wur hard work fur to find owt good to say o' Mr. Ralph, fur a' one liked to be civil to a murdered mon." And reflecting on this undeniable fact, he ventured to offer a few words of consolation. "It might be worse, sir," he said, respectfully. "It's bad enow, but it might ha' been someone that couldna be so well spared as Mr. Ralph—begging his pardon!"

"What is this about a stranger whom Blind John guided across the moor?" asked Quentin, turning round.

Whereupon Vose told all he knew about the mysterious traveller whose secrecy had appeared so suspicious to his guide. "John says he'd know the mon again, an' I think he would," finished Vose; "but, of course, th' chap 'll take care to keep out o' John's way. An' look at th' toime th' mon's had to get off! He'd catch th' seven train at North Rode, an' now it's nigh on ten."

"I'm going to the station to meet Dr. McKie. Can you wait here till he comes? He may wish to hear how you found my cousin."

Vose expressed his willingness to wait any time, all night if necessary, but ventured a remonstrance respecting the fog.

"It's like a blanket, sir. You'll never find th' station. Blind John 'll surely be back in a minute. He ought to ha' been here afore now."

The fact was that John, after despatching the telegram, had lingered to relate to the

station-master all that had happened; and had then looked in at the Wolf to see whether his late companions had reached there in safety. So that he was but just approaching the Hall gates when Fleming turned out of them.

"Did that telegram go directly, John?" called Quentin, hearing the tapping stick, though its owner was concealed by the fog.

"Oh, ay, Mr. Quentin," coming up; "I wur going to ask if I hadna best meet th' doctor at th' station."

"I am going. You have done enough walking for to-night."

"Nay—nay!" exclaimed John, who was enjoying himself thoroughly. "Th' walking's nowt. I'd best coom. Thee's bound to lose thysen, an' I should ha' a rare job to find thee—big as thou art. An' I hannot told thee about th' chap I took o'er th' moor. I'd like to tell thee mysen." And

John recounted his adventures of the evening with much satisfaction while he plodded on, bringing the story to an end as the Woffendale train drew up beside the platform and Dr. McKie stepped out.

He was unmistakably North British: a kindly Scot, gaunt and grizzled, with a bare shining pate that—according to his own theory—was the chief cause of his success as a physician.

"A bald head," he would remark, "is a grand thing in the medical profession. Man!—it's just wonderfu' how it inspires confidence. A doctor may wear a beard as long as he pleases, but if his hair were as long as his beard he wadna pit a bawbee into his pocket. The maist of folk appear to have a prejudice against a good head of hair, and there's no denying that Scripture bears them out. Look at Absalom and Samson. Did they not baith come to a waeful end?"

"There was Elijah," Quentin had once suggested upon an occasion when McKie was holding forth on the subject.

"Weel, ye canna say Elijah achieved any worldly success," the doctor had retorted triumphantly, his native Doric becoming stronger in the excitement of argument.

Whether owing to his bald head or not, Dr. McKie had certainly done well in Woffendale, so far as money was concerned. But a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth; and perhaps there had been a time long ago, when the old Scotchman had looked forward to a life different by far to the cheerless existence he led in the tall narrow Woffendale house looking out on the murky street; where his old Scotch housekeeper, as gaunt and grizzled as himself, kept him supplied with his national porridge, cock-a-leekie, and that queer dainty whereof

the outside is hard as the heart of man and the inside black with rich spice.

But whatever tangle of circumstance had kept Dr. McKie a bachelor, was known only to himself. He had come to Woffendale a stranger and had there settled down, speaking never of kith nor kin, making his way by natural shrewdness and skill.

With the Fleming family he had been on terms of intimate friendship for many years, and Quentin had always been his favourite. Therefore, a message from Wildersmoor interested him more than ordinary, and the one that summoned him to-night had been urgent.

"And what is the accident?" he inquired, as they stumbled towards the Hall in the fog. Then when Quentin told him—"Weel, he may have done it himself."

McKie had not, however, expected to find Ralph Fleming actually dead, grave

though the words of the telegram had been ; and his face grew more serious as he heard all that had happened.

"Weel, lad," he said to Quentin, after a brief examination of the body, "ye can console yourself with thinking naething could have saved your cousin. Mayhap, if a surgeon had been on the spot and stopped the bleeding, he might have lived. But naebody but a surgeon could have done it. Yes, I see," as Vose showed him the blood-stained stick, "that is his own property. I know it well. The end is loaded. Yes, that would do it. But, ma certes!" looking again at the dead man's head, "it was a strong arm that struck that blow. Robbery, no doubt, was the motive. His money and watch are on him, certainly, but that proves naething. The murderer might hear footsteps—Blind John's, for instance—and would fear to linger by the body. There will be an inquest, of course,

and it would be as well to let the police know soon. They might chance to catch that fellow, after all."

"I am going over to Woffendale to break this to my uncle," said Quentin, "and I thought of seeing the superintendent there."

"Nae, nae," said McKie, shaking his head. "Just send a message to the police-station, and let him come here and talk it over. Dinna disturb your uncle to-night. It's not far off eleven o'clock, and by the time ye get there, he'll be sleeping in peace. Let him rest till to-morrow, and I'll go with ye early, and help to tell him. I'm thinking I'll stay here with ye to-night, Quentin, if there's no objection. Elspeth knows weel where I am if need be, and I'd like to see the police when they come."

"You know you are always welcome at Wildersmoor, doctor. If you really think my uncle is best left in ignorance of what has happened——"

"I'm certain of that," interrupted McKie, with emphasis.

"Very well, then I will send a telegram to the police, as you suggest."

At last Blind John plodded homewards. He would cheerfully have spent the whole night in trudging; partly for the sake of the excitement it afforded him, and partly because a shining gold coin lay in his pocket, bestowed upon him by Fleming as guerdon for his labours.

"I hannot seen a sovereign fur many a day," he observed to Vose, who accompanied him on this last journey; "an' since Mr. Ralph is naught mooch to fret o'er, theer's no harm in saying it's an ill wind that blows nobody good. Tha'll not be shutting up th' Wolf th' minute tha gets back, wilt tha, Vose? It isna ower late yet, an' I mun ha' a pint o' sixpenny after a' this."

"Thee mun swallow it sharp, then,"

replied Vose; "I reckon tha'll ha' toime while I'm clearing th' chaps out. An' happen tha'll ha' a chance to earn a sixpence or two more if tha likes, fur if they've been sitting theer with only William to look after 'em, they'll noan be like to see their way whoam in broad dayleet, let alone in a fog."

When comparative quiet was restored in Wildersmoor Hall, Dr. McKie turned the key in the library-door, where was lying all that remained of Ralph Fleming.

"Have ye searched in his pockets for papers?" he inquired, as he followed Quentin to the dining-room. Fleming shook his head.

"Weel, ye'd better; for whatever they are, they will be nae credit either to himself or his family."

But as Fleming still declined, the doctor remarked that, "As an auld friend, he'd do it himself," and went back to the library,

whence he emerged a few minutes later with a pocket-book and a few letters.

"Here they are," he observed, laying them on the table. "Ye can either look over them yourself or give them to his father."

"I should prefer not examining them," said Quentin. "But if you would do so I should feel much obliged. Perhaps it would be better for someone to look at them before I take them to Woffendale."

"That is precisely my opinion," said McKie. "Why are ye pacing up and down the room like a caged lion? Ye take your cousin's death o'er much to heart, lad. I can see it in your face. For my part, it is just one of the few dispensations of Providence I can freely resign myself to. I'll look o'er these papers. They'll not take me a minute. And then I'll have a glass of toddy if ye'll ask me, Quentin."

"I am ashamed not to have done so sooner. I am so bewildered this evening that I never thought of it."

"Bide a wee," said the cautious North Briton as Fleming stretched out his hand to the bell. "It is as weel not to bring in servants till I have done with these. There's no telling how much may be seen at a glance."

He opened the pocket-book, commenting aloud upon its contents.

"A fair amount of money — yes — memoranda—nothing much—betting, and so on. Weel, the auld man can see that. Now for the letters—three of them. Here is one signed, 'J. Ulyett,' asking for money, and hinting that he has a right to expect it. It was written the day before yesterday. Ralph must have got it yesterday. It is dated from Driffield, and the writer says he will, perhaps, be in Woffendale shortly. Do ye know this Ulyett?"

"Yes; and so do you," taking the letter from McKie, "only you don't recollect him. You have met Jack Ulyett at the Rusholmes'. He is a relative of theirs. A nice fellow, but always coming to grief one way or another. He was with Marston and Co. in Driffield, but that has fallen through; so he is off to the West Coast."

"Just wanting in stability," commented McKie. "I remember him now. That sort are the rank and file of the human army, and need to be under a strong commander. There will be no occasion to show that to Mr. Fleming, so far as I can judge. If the laddie has relations in Woffendale, he'd rather they didn't hear of his affairs, and your uncle would be pretty sure to tell them, for there are bitter words in that letter. I don't doubt Ralph deserved them; but ye know, Quentin, that auld Elkanah thinks naebody should wag a tongue but himself."

Quentin dropped the letter into the blaze. For a moment it was transparent, the handwriting showing blackly. The next instant it shrivelled, and was gone. But in that moment a single sentence had stood out clearly before McKie's eyes. He had read it a few minutes earlier, but it had not then conveyed to his mind the significance it seemed to bear as it glowed there in the flame.

"I never thought of that!" he cried, making a snatch at the letter. Too late. It was gone.

"I didn't say burn it!" continued McKie, in great excitement. "Dinna ye see, lad, how it might be? Those words that stared me in the face but now—aye—out of the fire! It was evidence — that letter. Daft auld gomeril that I am!"

"I understand your suspicion," said Fleming, quietly; "but you are wrong. Whether Ulyett came to Woffendale to-

day or not, he never murdered Ralph. He would not harm a fly."

"Lad, ye canna tell. Want of money oft makes desperate men out of the softest. Ye say this Ulyett had friends and yet was always in difficulty. Now I ask ye, what was to hinder him coming to Woffendale to-day, as he proposed to do? How can ye tell that he did not follow Ralph here and have sharp words with him on the moor? How can ye tell yon Ulyett was not the stranger that Blind John led and did not recognize? He would be a stranger to John. He only stayed now and then in Woffendale. Dinna ye see how it all fits like the bits of a puzzle? And we can both bear witness to the letter."

"No," interrupted Quentin, leaning against the mantelpiece and looking down at McKie as he sat in an easy-chair before the fire, his hard features aglow with excitement; "you must pardon me, doctor,

but I am so convinced of Ulyett's entire innocence that nothing will induce me to utter a word that would cast the faintest suspicion upon him."

"There's the letter," said McKie, emphatically.

"We will not mention it."

"Not?"—McKie leant back and stared at Fleming in speechless amazement.

"I think not," repeated Quentin, deliberately.

If McKie had the North British obstinacy he had also the North British shrewdness and caution. In his place old Elkanah Fleming would have pooh-poohed any opposition to his own ideas, and would have persisted in detailing to the first policeman who arrived the contents of the letter and his own deductions therefrom. Not so McKie. He did not for a moment swerve from his own conviction that there was ground for suspicion against Ulyett; but

he felt that Quentin spoke as one having authority, and he recognized that he himself might be groping among pitfalls of which he knew nothing—deep pools veiled from his eyes by mists of ignorance.

"Of course," Fleming resumed after a pause, "I have no right to appear to dictate to you in this matter, but it is a terrible thing to charge an absolutely innocent man with a crime. I cannot permit Ulyett to be perhaps arrested. His very embarrassments would tell against him."

"Naturally," responded McKie, dryly. "Nevertheless, since ye put it so strongly, lad, I am willing to let the matter rest awhile. Here are the other two letters. I see Aveland's handwriting on one, so I'll open it first." Fleming made a swift movement as though to take from McKie the letter he was slowly unfolding. He checked himself apologetically, but with an angry knitting of the brows.

"I seem to be perpetually contradicting you this evening, doctor, yet I am not sure that we ought to read Dr. Aveland's correspondence."

McKie paused and considered a moment. "I think, under the circumstances, we may be allowed to do so. Aveland is not the man to have anything to say to your cousin that the whole world might not hear, and the letter may explain the reason of Ralph being on the moor to-night. So, with your permission, Quentin, I'll just look at it."

Fleming offered no further opposition. He knew the gist of that letter. He had heard of it already.

"Short, and to the purpose, and very proper," was McKie's comment. "Will ye read it?" holding out the note.

Fleming shook his head.

"Then I'll tell ye. It's just this. Ralph seems to have been going over to Sandhayes—intruding there, in fact; and Aveland

just tells him roundly that his presence is not desired. Depend upon it, that is what brought Ralph here to-night. He was going to Sandhayes to remonstrate. The assurance of one like him—for worthless he was—lifting his eyes to such a bonnie lassie as Aveland's daughter! I would have got up and forbid the banns myself. I suppose she will be going away to relations down south when her father dies. Weel, I shall miss the sight of her face."

"Is Dr. Aveland worse? He did not seem worse when I saw him yesterday."

"I'll not say worse," returned McKie, cautiously, "but he canna last long, and he may go off any minute. He will keep up to the last. Ah, that is just a dispensation of Providence I canna agree with. There are plenty of natural-born rascals that could weel be spared, and it's a real loss to the world that Aveland should leave it, and a terrible loss to his daughter."

Here the North Briton paused and looked up at Quentin.

"I have often wondered," he began, then stopped, checked by something in the young man's face. It needed a keen observer to detect the faint change of expression, yet McKie saw it, and felt instinctively that he must not finish the sentence.

"Here is the third letter and the last," he said. "A very uneducated hand, and signed 'Rossela.' Um!—precisely what I suspected when that girl disappeared from Wildersmoor. She tells Ralph that Ulyett had called to see him, and was much put out by not finding him there. Ye see, Quentin, how everything points to Ulyett as the man who crossed the moor with Blind John. He was first vexed at not seeing Ralph in Driffield. Then he writes that letter which is unfortunately burnt. Then, no doubt, he comes to Woffendale, finds Ralph here, they quarrel about the money, and there ye are!"

"No," said Fleming, "Ulyett never touched Ralph."

"Weel, I agreed to let the matter rest awhile, and so I will. Nevertheless, I have my opinion," shaking his head. "As for Rossela Darlow—the girl was always a bad lot. There never was any mistake about that. And, I daresay, she has feathered her nest pretty well. I should say ye can show this letter to auld Elkanah or not, at your discretion. By itself it does not incriminate Ulyett at all. And now, Quentin, I'll take my toddy, if ye'll kindly order it."

CHAPTER III.

WOFFENDALE is one of those Caves of Despair that men construct for themselves and their fellows. God Almighty never created such a den of dirt. The wild thyme spreads its scented carpet alike for king and beggar, and the wild bird sings its song. But carpet and song and every sweetness and consolation of life are denied to poverty in the brick and mortar cave called a manufacturing town. There the hard pavement only is under the tired feet, the jarring noise of crowded humanity the only song for the tired ears, and day by day, rich and poor

alike — deprived of the restful eternal pleasures provided for them in the glory of earth and sky—grow more and more rabid for amusement, and less and less capable of enjoyment.

"I cannot tell him," said Quentin, as he and McKie got out at Woffendale Station the next morning, and turned into the wide dingy street that led to Elkanah Fleming's house.

"I will do it," said McKie. "I expected to have to do it myself. But I canna see why ye should trouble owre much. If Ralph had been your ain brother, instead of just a cousin, and one no weel disposed towards ye either, ye could not fash yoursel mair about it. Ye look pale under your tan, lad, and your e'en are owre bright. There is Rusholme. I will ask him to come with us."

John Rusholme, a well-known and respected Woffendale merchant, was an

old friend of the Fleming family. He came up with the evident intention of speaking to Quentin and Mr. McKie, and his face was grave.

"I heard a rumour this morning of Ralph Fleming's death," he said. "Surely it is not true?"

"Unhappily it is," said Quentin. "We thought—I hoped—you would help us to tell my uncle."

"Certainly—certainly! I am sincerely grieved. Not that Ralph was all he should be, but one always hopes for reformation, and he was an only child. How did it happen?"

McKie related the story as the three walked up the street. The news was evidently spreading fast, for several people stopped them to ask if it were so.

"How could anyone in Woffendale know so soon?" Quentin uttered the question

almost impatiently, a rare mood for one so even-tempered as he.

McKie glanced at him.

"What does it matter, lad? The whole town will know in an hour. And what does it matter?"

"No, it does not matter," Fleming returned, absently.

"I imagine," said Rusholme, in his slow grave tones, "that the news first reached us by way of the railroad. My wife heard it from one of the maids, and she had been told by a porter. I have no doubt," addressing Quentin, "that the men at the Works are discussing it already."

"I daresay," replied Quentin, looking up at the smoke-darkened stone house which was the end of their journey. Was it only yesterday that he had walked up to this house in like manner? No, not in like manner. A century of feeling divided then from now.

Elkanah Fleming received the news of his son's death as Vose had predicted. After the first stunned incredulity, he was not so much overwhelmed by grief as transported with rage that Ralph should have been murdered, and yet the murderer have escaped. Elkanah's ruling idea was to seek out the man and have the satisfaction of handing him over to the police. This state of mind was infinitely less painful to his friends than crushing grief would have been, though his denunciations greatly shocked Mrs. Holt, the widowed sister-in-law, who had kept his house since his wife's death.

"Pray, Elkanah, restrain youself. It is not the manner in which to bear such an affliction."

"Affliction, Maria!" roared her brother-in-law, "this is a murder!—a foul abominable murder! And I'll see the rope round the scoundrel's neck yet. Quentin, I'll come to the Hall with you now. You say

the police are there, don't you? Besides, I'd like to see——," his voice failed for a moment. "Yes, I'll come at once. Are you going, McKie? Patients want you, I suppose. Well, turn in again this evening, will you? Come to dinner. I should like to talk this over with you."

"Elkanah," said Mrs. Holt, "is poor Ralph to be brought here?"

"Of course—of course. Quentin will explain. Just come into my study, Rusholme, and help me to write out an offer of reward. I can leave it at the printer's on my way to the station. Posters must be got out at once. No good relying on the police. They are always useless in these cases."

He went out of the room, followed by Rusholme, and McKie took the opportunity of telling Mrs. Holt that the inquest would be held at Wildersmoor.

"I am sure I am very glad," she said

plaintively, "though it is very disagreeable for you, Quentin."

"Anything that I can do——" said Quentin, and stopped.

"I know you will," replied Mrs. Holt, putting her handkerchief to her eyes. "It troubles me dreadfully to think of the terribly unprepared state of dear Ralph. Then, too, his being murdered, and the inquest. Not — er — quite nice for the family."

"No," assented McKie, stonily, "it is not usually considered nice—not at all. I am afraid I'll have to leave ye now, Mrs. Holt. My patients will be hoping I am not coming."

"But we shall see you to dinner, Dr. McKie?"

"Assuredly. I am entirely at the disposal of Mr. Fleming and yourself."

He drew Quentin into the hall.

"The auld man takes it in the best way

—the way of action. Let him do what he likes about the reward. It gives him something to think of, something to do, and so relieves a strain that might be dangerous, ye see. There may be a reaction by-and-by. Meanwhile he is all right. I'll look in on him when he comes back with ye from Wildersmoor, and I'll dine with him this evening. If there is anything else ye want done, lad?——" McKie paused, inquiringly.

"There is nothing I can remember just now, thank you, doctor. I am very grateful for all you have done."

"Weel, don't let it worry ye, and I'll take that as my fee."

The door had hardly closed behind him when the elder Fleming reappeared. "McKie gone? Off to his patients, eh? Look here, Quentin. Rusholme and I think this will do," holding out a paper.

"Your uncle," said Rusholme, "wished to name a higher sum. But I consider five

hundred pounds enough when offered for finding the man who went to North Rode with Blind John. We are not sure that the stranger is the murderer."

"Not sure!" exclaimed Elkanah. "Rusholme, I'll stake my life on it. Of course, that fellow is my son's murderer."

"I believe he is," replied Rusholme, "but we cannot be absolutely certain. Five hundred is enough. It will be easy to raise it at any time if you should decide to do so. I need not say I think the offer of reward a wise step. It will stimulate the police for one thing, and may perhaps induce them to regard a man's life as of almost the same value as his watch. Do you go to Wildersmoor now?"

Elkanah nodded.

"Come with us, Rusholme."

"I am afraid I hardly can. But I will see to these being printed," touching the paper in his hand. "That will save you

a little time and trouble, and I will look in when you return."

Elkanah nodded again.

"I am much obliged. Yes, come again this afternoon. I shall be back about three."

"And will you ask dear Esmé if she can spend to-day with me, Mr. Rusholme?" said Mrs. Holt. "It would be a great consolation to me to have her."

"I am sure she will be most happy to come," replied Esmé's father. "Our sympathy with you is very great."

Which was true. The Rusholmes had rather hoped to see Esmé the wife of Ralph Fleming. Not that Ralph was exactly an amiable—or even a decent—character, but if Esmé wished to reform him, it was not for her parents to object. It is but just to Mr. and Mrs. Rusholme to say that they would not for a moment have urged, or even advised, their daughter

to marry Ralph. They were simply acquiescent. A higher degree of virtue could not be expected from them. The Fleming wealth was immense, and Ralph's father and aunt evidently favoured the marriage, or Esmé would not have been so constantly invited to the house. A day had seldom passed without Mrs. Holt sending for her, either to drive or to dine and spend the evening. Therefore Ralph Fleming's unexpected death came as a shock to the Rusholme household. Perhaps Mr. Rusholme had hardly realized how much he had counted on the marriage till this morning, when he knew that fate had swept it into that vast rubbish heap of things that might have been. The thought of the chance that was lost followed him to his office; made itself evident in the note he sent to his daughter, giving her Mrs. Holt's message; haunted him all day. "It was a pity," he said to himself repeatedly,

even while he tried to persuade himself that Esmé was better without such a husband as Ralph Fleming.

Old Elkanah, driving to the station with his nephew, alluded to the matter.

"Maria always set her mind on marrying poor Ralph to that eldest girl of Rusholme's. I don't know that I should have objected. She is not much to look at, and a fool. But she might have managed Ralph. Well, you are the only one left now, Quentin," this with a suppressed groan.

Quentin listened silently, wishing for words wherewith to comfort the grieving father, yet knowing that he had none to offer—that he, of all men, could have none to offer. To him the events of the last sixteen or seventeen hours had been as a frightful dream. Surely awaking would come — that blessed awaking which never does come after great calamity. For many days there would be for Quentin no dewy

Aurora, but the heavy returning to consciousness of the great Florentine's Dawn, back from the mists of sleep to a darkened and troubled future. He never clearly remembered how that day passed. Vaguely he recollected taking his uncle to Wildersmoor, to the quiet library where that which had been Ralph was lying on the table. He recalled, too, Blind John standing in the hall as he had stood the night before; repeating as it seemed interminably the story of his walk through the fog with the stranger. There was also Vose, who took up John's story when it stopped at the Grey Wolf; and the deferential police inspector. All these passed before Quentin as phantasmagoria; and ever beyond them—more distinct than all—was that stark figure lying in the library. It seemed to be always present; to be listening to each voice that told the tale of its earthly ending, or debated the manner in which it

had parted with life, or detailed the fruitless seeking for the unknown murderer. For the search had failed, and the inspector met blandly the anger of Elkanah Fleming, explaining the reasons of failure.

"You see, sir, our hope was that the officials at North Rode would be able to describe and identify the man, but they are positive no stranger left the station either by the seven or any other train that evening. Therefore, we think he must have walked on to Riverton along the line, guided by the fence and unseen in the fog. So now we do not know whether he was dark or fair, tall or short. Blind John says he was young, by his step, and John may be right, but that one fact is not much to go upon. Whoever he was, he must have followed Mr. Ralph from Wildersmoor station, where he arrived at five o'clock from Woffendale. At that time the fog was not so dense. Doubtless the

increasing fog emboldened the fellow to attack Mr. Ralph. He may have demanded money, or attempted to snatch his watch, and, failing, must have wrenched Mr. Ralph's stick from him and struck him with it. The end is loaded. Perhaps Mr. Ralph threatened him with it. The blow may have been only intended to stun—not to kill. Then something appears to have startled the murderer. He fled away through the fog and naturally lost himself. Or, if he was no thief, but a personal enemy of Mr. Ralph's, he would hasten away from the spot through fear of detection. Thanks to the fog, nobody saw him come, nobody saw him go; and the ground is too frozen for any footprints. In fact, sir, we have absolutely no clue whatever. Blind John says he should recognize the man's voice. Well, if he ever does, we may hit upon something. But as John told the man he should know him again, we may be sure that the fellow

will keep out of John's way. Of course, we shall do our utmost, sir; but I confess that unless some fresh evidence turns up, we see little chance of discovering the man."

"Somebody must have seen him at the station here," said Elkanah.

"Unfortunately, sir, the tickets were taken by a young boy who is a complete stranger to the neighbourhood, and who was so engrossed by the—to him—novel responsibility, that he did not notice the passengers who got out, except to be careful that they gave him their tickets. You see, sir, the night was foggy, and the lad had only a lantern by the gate, so that it is natural he would not notice those who passed when they were all strangers to him. There were several third class tickets and one first. We have supposed the first to be Mr. Ralph's."

"What makes you suggest that my son

might have had a personal enemy? Of whom are you thinking?"

"Oh, not of anyone in particular, sir, oh—no. Only—" with a little deprecatory cough—"Mr. Ralph might have had a personal enemy."

Ralph Fleming was likely to have had a good many personal enemies, and of an unscrupulous class, too. His father knew this as well as anybody. He appealed to Quentin.

"Cannot you hit upon anyone who would be likely to owe Ralph a grudge?" But Quentin shook his head. Elkanah turned to the inspector again.

"You know, Hills," he said, authoritatively, "you police are far to apt to let a thing of this sort quietly slide when you cannot discover the man immediately. You take more trouble over a burglary than over a murder. Now, I am going to have placards printed and distributed, offering

five hundred pounds reward for the finding of the man who crossed the moor with John here; and I'll double that sum when the man is convicted. We'll see what that will do. If you like to earn it, well and good. I don't care who gets the money so long as I get the scoundrel hanged. But you must bestir yourself, Hills."

"No exertion on our part will be spared, Mr. Fleming."

"I hope so—I hope so. Quentin, I may as well be going back to town. It is getting on for three o'clock, and I have several things to attend to. Are you coming with me?"

"Yes, I thought of going to the Works."

"Do, and take with you a copy of the reward. Read it to the hands, or get somebody else to do it for you. The placards cannot be printed in a minute, and the offer cannot be too soon known. I'll write it out on a slip of paper for you."

Elkanah went into the dining-room, and the inspector, relieved by his absence, drew a little nearer to the wide hall fireplace where the leaping flames were putting to shame the pale wintry sunshine that streamed in through the long windows. Quentin, though silent, looked sympathetic; and the much-worried Hills unburdened his mind to him.

"You see yourself, sir, how little we have to go upon. Merely a suspicion of the man whom Blind John guided, and no clue even to that man save John's recollection of his voice"—rubbing his chin and gazing perplexedly at the fire. "Of course, we would do our utmost, but what are we to do? It is natural Mr. Fleming should take on so—quite natural, and the reward is handsome. But I doubt its bringing anything to light."

"Chance may help you," said Quentin.

"It may, sir, it may. Nothing else will,

you may depend upon that. This morning I walked over every step of the way from here to North Rode with Blind John showing me the path they took, in hopes of finding something the stranger might have dropped—a handkerchief or envelope, or anything that might afford a clue. But I had no luck—no luck!"

Quentin looked at Hills' honest perplexed face, and wondered if in the end he would have thought it luck had he picked up a handkerchief or envelope belonging to the stranger. For a moment Fleming felt a violent desire to laugh outright. How they all lost themselves in a labyrinth of their own conjectures. Yet how simple it really was, no labyrinth at all. How easy to explain, to set Hills right in one—no, two—three words. And the mocking devil within urged Quentin to say them. Had he said them? He pulled himself together as one falling out of an

evil dream. Had he laughed? No, for there was Hills still rubbing his chin, staring at the fire as though the babbling flame were telling the secret in an unknown tongue. And there was the stillness about the library door: the stillness that ever seemed to be gathering itself tangibly—becoming a listening Presence.

"It's a queer thing," said Hills. "There is no denying Mr. Ralph had plenty to wish him ill, but I cannot, so to speak, hit upon anyone who would be likely to follow and kill him. There is the girl Rossela Darlow, whose grandmother lives close by. I had a sort of idea she might have had a quarrel with Mr. Ralph since she went away, and she's a bad lot, and revengeful. But Mr. Fleming tells me there was a letter from her found on Mr. Ralph that shows no ill-feeling, and she has not left Driffield. Besides, even a strong young woman could never have given such a blow.

So we are driven to think it must have been done by the man whom Blind John took to North Rode; especially as he did not take the train there, but must have walked along the line to Riverton or Burne, and that looks queer to me—looks as though he wished to leave no trace behind him. He must have been strong, too, to strike Mr. Ralph down like that, for he was as tall as you, sir, only a bit slimmer. I have sent one of our men to Driffield to make inquiries. Mr. Ralph was backwards and forwards there a good deal."

"He had a shooting-box on the moors," said Quentin.

"So I have understood, sir. We may hear something there," doubtfully.

Here Elkanah Fleming came out of the dining-room with two slips of paper.

"One each," he said, giving them to his nephew and the inspector. "The fellow who crossed the moor must be known to some-

body who'll not be likely to keep his mouth shut when he hears he can get five hundred pounds, and perhaps twice that, by opening it."

"There are men who would not speak even for a thousand," said Quentin, folding up the paper and pocketing it.

"Precious few," rejoined his uncle. "Before that offer is a month old I shall have the monstrous villain safe in Woffendale gaol. You are all as apathetic as possible. If it were not for me there would be a few slipshod inquiries made and then dropped, and my son's murderer would remain another of the undetected criminals skulking about. But that is not my way," striking his fist on the black oaken table. "I shall neither rest nor die till I have found this man!" He pursued the subject in the train returning to Woffendale.

"Did you notice that Hills was ashamed

to reply? He knows every word I say is true. Slipshod the whole lot of them. What are you saying, Quentin? Shall I want you again this evening? No, I think not. See about that paper being read at the Works. That is all I want done at present, lad."

By the time they reached the town, the short day was gone; the brief twilight merged in the smoke of Woffendale, where the glare of furnaces did not lighten, but deepened the murky gloom of the winter evening. Ralph Fleming's death had been generally known since early that morning, and, whether a man is liked or not, his violent death is sure to excite interest in the place where he has lived. There was a perceptible stir of suppressed eagerness throughout the Works that Quentin felt and understood as he went through the rooms. One or two heads of departments ventured to express a rough sympathy, and

asked a question or two. He had decided on reading the paper himself. Why not? And he accordingly gave orders that the men should assemble in the yard five minutes before closing-time.

It was an expectant sea of faces that looked up at Quentin as he stood on the steps of the principal doorway, the light from within streaming out upon him into the night, his height and breadth looking almost gigantic in the confused mingling of brilliancy and gloom. Below, the light fell brightly here and there on the mass of men. Beyond it they stood in deep shadow, save where a flickering gaslight by the gate shed a feeble glimmer. There was a vague idea among the hands that Fleming intended to make a formal announcement of his cousin's death, accompanying it, probably, with a few moral reflections, and as much good as could be said of the dead man without calling up feelings of sardonic

mirth in the listeners. "An' that'll not be mooch, neyther!" commented one burly fellow.

Then the various conjectures were hushed into silence as Quentin opened the slip of paper.

"You have all heard of my cousin's sad death," he said. "There is no need for me to tell you anything of that. Mr. Fleming has decided to offer a reward for the discovery of the murderer. To-morrow you will see the placards respecting it. Meanwhile, my uncle wishes me to read the notice to you."

Quentin's voice was one that carried well. Clear, yet soft, with a penetrating quality that travelled far without jarring the ears on which it struck, overcoming without difficulty the noisy rattle of the street beyond the silent yard where the men stood listening to the few brief sentences.

"That is all." He refolded the paper, looking down on the upturned faces. "That is all. But I am sure that without any inducement whatever, each one of you would—if possible—hand over the murderer to the doom—" he paused a moment—"which he deserves."

Another silence followed, a silence quite different to the stillness in which they had hearkened to Elkanah's message and Quentin's words. That silence had been alert, this was meditative — nay, to a sensitive spirit there was even in it a faint suggestion of dissent.

"'Tis natural Mr. Fleming should take on about Mr. Ralph, being his son," tentatively observed the engineer, a strong, thickset fellow with a short black beard; "an' murder's a bad job, o' course, an' we're all main sorry for Mr. Fleming."

Here the speaker stopped, as not wishing to commit himself by expressing any

decided opinion respecting the reward, and a murmur of approval went through the crowd.

"Mr. Fleming will be glad to have your sympathy. He will tell you so himself. Good-night!"

"Good-night, sir," echoed the men, as Quentin came down the steps, and, passing through the yard, went his way along the noisy street to the station, and so back to the hush of Wildersmoor and the mocking companionship of the dead man in the library.

Freed from the restraint of Quentin's presence, the Atlas hands commented freely upon the offered reward as they poured out of the yard.

"Five hundred pound—an' happen a thousand—isna bad. It 'ud set up a chap fur loife, an' owd Elkanah 'ud pay up sharp, too. If it wurna blood-money! Folks say it allus brings bad luck, but I think I'd risk it if I'd th' chance."

"I mout if I know'd who th' chap wur, an' what he did it fur," opined another. "I dunnot say as I'd hond o'er a Woffendale mon to th' police, seeing what Mr. Ralph wur. Happen it's a stranger."

"I reckon we needna worrit oursen wi' thinkin' on't, lads," broke in the voice of the engineer, "fur it isna likely th' felly 'll tell o' hissen, an' how else can he be found out? Who's going to worrit a chap wi' nowt against him but Blind John's recollecting his voice? He's getten off scot free—that's about it. An', since somebody wur to be murdered, it's summat to be thankful fur as it wur Mr. Ralph—theer!"

CHAPTER IV.

THE inquest was over, and the crowd of Wildersmoor and Woffendale folk who had attended dispersed to discuss the verdict of Wilful Murder with unabated interest. The Grey Wolf had so much custom that the landlord found it necessary to call in extra assistance.

"I dunnot know as I ever wur in such a doment," he remarked, as dusk closed in. "What wi' being wanted at the inquest, an' wanted here, an' wanted theer, an' borrowing beer mugs fro' th' neighbours fur such a many, I hannot had such a

toime at th' owd Wolf in a' my loife!"

The Snug was full of guests that day, and Blind John repeated over and over again the details of his guidance of the stranger across Wildersmoor.

"Well," observed a listener, when John had reached the end of his story for about the twentieth time, "I allus say theer mun be summat bad about a mon when he willna tell folk wheer he wur born. Why dunnot he tell? It wurna his own doin'."

"Ay," agreed another, "tha'rt reet theer. I never did hold wi' strangers. Give me a chap as I've know'd when he wur a lad, an' his feyther an' mother, an' grandfeyther an' grandam, an' then I con tell pretty well what he'll be up to. You never con make out th' meaning o' a stranger's marlocks."

"I'll warrant theer'll be no more marlocks fur that chap if so be as I ever coom

across him again," said Blind John, emphatically.

"He'll keep out o' thy road, John."

"Happen he'll try to, but, see here, chaps," and John slapped his hands down on his knees and leant forward, speaking slowly and earnestly, "if things is to be, why, they is to be—isna that so?"

This appeal to the underlying fatalism in the north-country character was answered by a low murmur of assent.

"Ay," continued John, "that's it. Things is to be, an' you conna stop 'em. You may try to stop 'em, an' th' trying 'll be just what'll bring 'em to pass somehow. You conna get shut o' what is to be. Eh, theer weer Tony Balshaw—some on you'll recollect Tony — him as had th' Copse Farm. One morning his wife says to him, 'I wish thee would stay whoam to-day. I'd an ill dream o' thee. I dreamt I seed thee lying dead wi' a fir-tree atop o' thee.'

'Tha needna fret thysen, lass,' he says, 'fur I'm going o'er to Woffendale, an' I reckon theer's noan fir-trees theer.' So he went, an' as he wur going along Mill Street theer wur a waggon-load o' pine timber passing. Off cooms one o' th' wheels, an' down cooms th' whole load atop o' Tony, an' when they got him out he wur stone dead. You see, he thowt to be out o' th' way o' death, an' he ran reet into it. It's th' same wi' everything. It wur to be as Mr. Ralph wur to die, his toime had coom. It wur to be as I wur to lead that chap o'er Wildersmoor i' the fog. It wur to be as I wur to find Mr. Ralph as I coom whoam; an', mark you, th' toime 'll come when I'll hear that chap again. Ay, it'll coom, I tell thee, it'll coom—it's bound to coom!"

That same afternoon, when Ralph Fleming had been carried back to his father's house and the old Hall was free

from the shadow of death, the Hall's master turned out of the gates and struck across the moor with long swift strides. There had been so much to attend to, so many people coming and going, that this—the end of the third day — was, as it were, the first breathing-space Fleming had had since Vose and his companions halted with their grim burden beneath the pines.

The December twilight was already closing in. A little chill wind rustled the withered fern and dry sedges by the frozen pools, and died away seaward in faint eerie sighs. Every leaf and twig and stem of the tawny fronds of the dead bracken, and the copper-coloured brambles was edged with powdery rime that shook off in tiny crystals when the wind swayed the stiff branches to and fro over the shrivelled herbage and deep dark moss. A desolate scene, perhaps, to a stranger, but to Quentin the moor was as the face of a

familiar friend, changing in expression—unchanging in feeling. So still and lonely, so grey and dim; waking up into flame now and then beneath the light of dawn or glow of sunset—only for a brief space, long enough to show what a flush and glory of colour there was on that dusky moorland. Then resuming its sad-hued garments of mist and shadow and grey cloud, as though it were dreeing its weird in silent endurance. Little wonder the Lancashire folk are such fatalists. There nature itself teaches them. Even the moaning wind coming up over the sandhills from the restless sea seems to whisper the resistlessness of fate. The great extent of moor made it solitary. Its scanty population was not much given to walking, and the dwellers on the outlying farms preferred taking their holiday jaunts further afield. So it was possible to wander about for hours without meeting any human being, without even

catching a glimpse of a distant figure making its way across the dusky expanse.

Fleming walked on in the gathering gloom, the darkening sky overhead, the steel-like gleam of the frozen pools beside him. He was almost as familiar with the moor as was Blind John, having wandered over it at all times and seasons; in the white dawn—at sunset—at dead of night; in warmth of summer and in winter snow: so that his feet mechanically led him whither he would go.

He was, perhaps, two miles from the Hall, when a figure came slowly from behind a clump of willows and into the path—an old woman with snow-white hair and piercing black eyes. She wore a long dark blue cloak, the hood drawn over her head. Quentin's hand involuntarily sought his pocket. It was winter, and Granny Darlow was poor, and, what is worse, old. For poverty may be remedied in a moment,

but none can cure age save the magician Death. Granny was accounted a wise woman by the neighbourhood, but among the strange herbs she gathered on Wildersmoor there was none to lift the weight of years.

So being himself young and strong, and kindly disposed towards all living things, it was natural that Fleming should feel compassion for the old woman, giving her not only money—which may be thrown by anyone—but also the laughing sympathetic friendship which was Quentin's characteristic and the reason of his popularity. He stood high in Granny Darlow's good opinion, higher than he was aware.

"He wur summat loike a mon—soul an' body," she would say to the Wildersmoor folk. "Most chaps has neither, as fur as I con make out!"

"Theer's Mr. Ralph, his cousin, nigh as big, if it's th' bigness as takes thy fancy," Blind John had once said.

"Dost tha take me fur siccan a fool as thysen?" Granny had responded.

John, however, had merely spoken for the sake of annoying the old woman. He himself had a great admiration for Quentin and Quentin's donations, so he protested hastily and truthfully "that he never thowt well o' Mr. Ralph—not he."

"Tha needna fear I'll tell on thee," replied Granny, disdainfully. "Tha says it to cross me. I know thee reet well. I con believe tha dunnot like Mr. Ralph, fur tha never gets owt from him, neither speech nor brass. An' tha likes Mr. Quentin three parts fur what tha gets an' th' remainder fur hissen—theer!"

Granny Darlow's regard was not in the slightest degree tinged with any mercenary feeling. She would have been equally devoted to Fleming had he never possessed a penny. What she admired was the young man's overflowing vitality, his good looks

and sunny temper, his honourable simplicity of character. These last few days, during the general excitement caused by Ralph Fleming's mysterious death, Granny Darlow alone had made no comment whatever, except that "theer wur a mort o' noise being made o'er a chap as wur better out o' the world than in it." For the rest, she went about with her mouth grimly shut, giving no reply to the numerous indirect inquiries made about her absent grand-daughter, Rossela.

Now, meeting Quentin in the pale snow-lit twilight on Wildersmoor, her black eyes encountered his dark grey ones with an inscrutable look in their depths, the look of one who sees the lifeboat disappearing in turmoil of wind and wave. It may return the same gallant boat; or it may return shattered, disabled; or—not at all.

"Cold for the New Year, Granny," said Fleming, lightly. "Here is something to

buy a gown with," dropping a coin into the withered hand.

"Ay, to be sure, 'tis th' New Year to-morrow," with a little curtsey. "I wish thee good luck through it, Mr. Quentin, an' through every year after."

He nodded smiling, and passed on. Then a sudden recollection of the old woman's history shot through his mind, and an equally sudden feeling of comprehension. There were strange tales on Wildersmoor of Granny Darlow's youth, and Fleming, like everyone else, had heard them—but unheeding. Her life-story, true or false, had had no particular interest for him. Now, however, he recalled those whispered tales, and wondered if that grim drama had indeed been played, and if that withered old woman with the brilliant eyes were sister-spirit to her of Mycenæ. He turned and looked back. Granny Darlow was standing where he had left her, gazing after him.

The discovery gave Quentin a slight shock. Why should she gaze at him thus earnestly? He did not remember her ever doing so before. But then he had never noticed. Was there some subtle change in him that was perceived by the swift intuition of the old woman? A moment later he told himself this idea was but the reflex of the fantastic colouring that his thoughts had taken concerning her. Besides, what did it matter? What did anything matter now?

He walked on rapidly, careless whither he went, and the night closed round him—a still, glittering winter night; the grey-white earth beneath, the starry blue-black sky overhead. In the distance the lights of a farm-house shone warmly. Fleming turned his back upon them, going in an opposite direction. After a while he stopped, turned again and struck into a path that led westward to the sea. A mile out of the little fishing village of North Rode stood an old

farm-house, a plantation of larches sheltering it from the north-east. It had been added to by Dr. Aveland, and was now a quaint comfortable residence. In front the garden sloped to the high road that skirted the beach, where the dim sea rolled up with its ceaseless thunder. A few yards from the gate Fleming stood still. There were lights in the windows, warm lights of home that shone through the drawn curtains into the eyes of the man outside and down into his heart. Just so had they shone four days ago, but then he had not lingered without as now. When anything cleaves a life in twain, sets a gulf between past and present, sense of time is lost. There is no time to us, and each day is as a thousand years. One counts one's life not by the dates in the almanack, but by one's own changes of thought and feeling. "When I thought that; when I felt thus;" these are the only dates, written on the human spirit like the

changing characters on the demon sabres, the last writing permanent.

Therefore to Quentin those lights shone with a strange familiarity, as though he had been long, long absent. He had not intended to come here to-night, yet he had come. He was not going in. By-and-by he would; not to-night. By-and-by, when the Avelands returned. They were going up to London to-morrow, to stay two months. Dr. Aveland had said so in a note of polite regret that he had sent to Quentin on hearing of Ralph Fleming's death. By-and-by he would go there again —as a friend. A question had come into Fleming's life, and he was prepared to solve it in the characteristically masculine fashion of running away. All men, even the best and noblest, believe that the gravest problems of life can be satisfactorily settled by flight of one kind or another. If a man fails in his business, he cuts his throat;

believing that he thereby makes things more comfortable for his penniless wife and children. If some unexpected obstacle arises to his union with the woman he loves, and he has already spoken to her of marriage, he will write her a letter of farewell, and run away. If he has not so spoken, he will congratulate himself that the solution of the question is thus rendered easier, and will run away in effect; letting his changed manner—and that only—tell her of his changed thought. It never occurs to him that she has as much interest in the matter as he, and has a right, at least, to know the reason of a change that affects her so vitally. Flight seldom settles any question: it still remains unanswered. But flight is easy; and the man who will unconcernedly face shot and shell, sickness and death, turns coward before a moral difficulty, and runs away.

Therefore Quentin Fleming, being con-

fronted with a terrible knot in his thread of life, and having never perceived that, the Fates being women, their intricate weaving is best understood by a woman, determined, in masculine fashion, to run away from the woman who could untie the knot for him, could answer the question which to him was unanswerable. Only four days since he had crossed that threshold with such high hopes and bounding pulses. Only four days since he had said to himself that the next time—the next time! Well, here was the next time. Southward over the roof glittered Orion. Vaguely, as one thinks in dull pain, Fleming recalled some far-off dreadful fancy linked with the familiar constellation and fraught with new significance. Was there not in the great nebula of Orion the star-jewelled phantom of that grisly shape that "wore the likeness of a kingly crown?" A phantom that for Quentin had no terrors so long as he lived

his life alone, but that stood between him and happiness. Invisible was that grim shape, hidden in the constellation that became its outward visible sign; so that Orion, lifting his starry splendour above the low roof of Sandhayes, his sword pointing downwards over Wildersmoor, stood as a warning angel barring the way lest that which was hidden should be revealed.

The stars in their courses move swiftly. Even as Quentin looked, the Hunter's noiseless stride took him higher—higher. Would those stars in their courses fight for or against him? Still Orion marched on, and the sea sang its song. The tide was high, the white foam glimmering in the starlight as it rushed over the shingle. How long he stood there Fleming never knew. At last he turned away. We always have to turn away from everything, no matter what. There is never any pause save the briefest. Whether the path lies

over thorns or on softest grass, we may not linger. If we creep into a thicket to give a moment's rest to our stiff and bleeding limbs, Time and Necessity, our task-masters, find us out, crack their whips in our ears, and we get up and stagger on. And, what is worse, we may not shelter others, not even help them. Our sufferings do not alleviate theirs. If we fall for very weariness we may not lie there and die. We must rise and be driven once more—driven—driven—till our feet touch the cool blessed shadowy waters of Death, and then the whip-cracking ceases—so far as we know.

CHAPTER V.

THE fishing-village of North Rode possessed an ivy-clad church, a lych-gate, and a churchyard wherein the gravestones leant all ways and every way, as though the strong sea-winds had made the little plot of ground their chiefest wrestling-place. There was the Vicarage, a red-brick house with the date, 1710, cut on a small stone slab let in over the front door; the station, the solitary shop, which was also the post-office; and the smithy. The cottages of the fisher-folk ran for a short distance in two parallel lines from the church, thus

forming the one street. Then, apparently becoming weary of monotony, they straggled aimlessly about, finally flinging themselves recklessly anywhere on beach and moor.

Sandhayes, where the Avelands lived, was about a mile from the village. It had once been a farm-house, the property of an energetic maiden lady who carried on the farm. She was a cousin of Mrs. Aveland, and so Frances spent most of her childhood here, her parents being glad that the child should have the pure air and free life impossible in London. When the old lady died, she left the farm to Frances. Mrs. Aveland had been dead many years, and Dr. Aveland resolved to leave town and spend on Wildersmoor what remained to him of life. His health had latterly failed seriously, the winters on that part of the coast are usually mild, and his old friend, Nicholas Fleming, Quentin's father, lived

only seven miles away at Wildersmoor Hall. Frances returned to the moor with delight; the place where one has spent one's childhood is generally the place one loves best. This was three years ago. During those three years Nicholas Fleming had died, and Quentin reigned at Wildersmoor. The Vicar of North Rode, too, had passed away—an old man—and his successor, the Rev. Cyril Paton, had married a friend of Frances Aveland.

This bright, frosty morning in February Mrs. Paton turned out of the village along the beach-road to Sandhayes. Despite the chill of the air, there was in it a faint suggestion as of a coming thaw. The rime-laden trees did not hold themselves so stiffly; the sandy ground had lost its iron ring; the frozen grass glistened wetly in the sunshine; a subtle change had passed even over the far-sparkling green of the sea—a film, a gossamer haze. But Nina

Paton cared for none of these things. For her there was no beauty in those low sand-hills melting into the dusky expanse of Wildersmoor. It needed a different cast of mind to love that soft bare grey coast, full of tones of delicate yellow, and dusky brown, and deep dark emerald, and no brighter colour save at glow of sunset or sunburst after storm.

So Nina walked on, eyes and ears alike unheeding. From the village came sounds of homely human life. The ring of the blacksmith's hammer on the anvil, the clatter of clogs on the round stones of the village street, the shout of a fisherman to a comrade on the beach, the whistle of a train at North Rode station: sounds that grew fainter till only the murmur of the sea broke the stillness.

How desolate the moorland looked, she thought, outstretched beneath the pale blue sky; a wide undulating plain of warm deep

colouring, umbers, and siennas, and faded wallflower tints, with here and there a touch of orange, and here and there a touch of scarlet, where the sunshine caught a vivid frond of withered bracken or tattered bramble; and, over all, the glittering greyness of the melting rime. The red roof of Sandhayes nestled cosily enough by the protecting larch wood, the trees forming a rampart to north and east, but leaving the old farm-house open to west and south—to sun and sea. It was a low irregular building, with a big old-fashioned porch and a wide path from door to gate, on either side of which stood a closely-clipped yew, that on the right being trimmed into the shape of a gigantic teapot, that on the left into a fair-sized boat. Perhaps the original clipper, inspired by the neighbouring village, wished to symbolize the fisherman's life at home and abroad. Be as that may, the oldest man in North Rode

could not recall the time when "boart an' teapot" had not stood at the gate of Sandhayes. And they were likely to remain, for Frances Aveland greatly delighted in them. What she liked her father also liked, and so all things were at peace.

Mrs. Paton's face assumed a more cheerful expression as her eyes rested on Sandhayes. They were pretty eyes, of a soft grey-blue, and the face was pretty, too; the features irregular, but the colouring bright; and the fair curls that clustered thickly beneath her hat—and, indeed, all over her head, for Nina Paton wore her hair short—were no dull flaxen tint, but shining yellow. Yet more smiling became the grey-blue eyes when a small terrier bounded out of the white gate, and, recognizing a friend, rushed towards her with effusive welcome. Following the dog came a girl of stately beauty and slow grace of movement; black-haired, with straight black brows over eyes

that were not black nor brown, as might have been expected, but grey—the grey of clear lake-water before dawn; eyes that might have been those of a Nixe, that suggested some far northern ancestry. Signy's soul might have looked out upon the world through just such grey windows. The face was a delicate oval, the mouth and chin firmly modelled, the complexion almond-white, with carnations, the head nobly poised. Small wonder that Quentin Fleming saw that face ever before him; drawing him across Wildersmoor early and late, in storm and shine; unconsciously urging him to sacrifice himself, lest the threatening shadow ahead should darken life for her; now, when that shadow seemed to his calmer mind less distinct, raising his hopes once more, drawing him again to Sandhayes over those seven wild miles.

The Avelands had been in London for nearly two months; a time of dolour for

Nina Paton, who was as a lost soul in the absence of her friend.

"Oh, it is good to have you back again, Frances!" she said, fervently. "Six weeks and more of solid parish, without the relief of your society, is rather much. Observe my haste to welcome you home."

"I do observe it, and am grateful. I also was coming to you."

"But not so quickly. Who is it that says the feet of Love are never so swift as those of Hate? Your affection for me does not waft you to North Rode with the celerity that my rage with parochial trivialities wafts me to Sandhayes."

Frances laughed softly.

"It may be so. Certainly people do not take so much trouble to make their friends happy as they do to make their enemies uncomfortable. Yet if you wanted me, Nina, I think I should not be long on the way."

"I know you would not. There is a ferocious integrity about you that would compel you to come to and stand by a friend to the uttermost, so long as that friend demanded it of you, even if the said friend did not amuse you. That," continued Mrs. Paton, reflectively, "I consider the highest point of human virtue — to exert yourself on behalf of a person who does not amuse you."

"Is it the parish that does not amuse you just now? or is it Mr. Paton?"

"Oh, I am not so unreasonable as to expect amusement from a man who has undertaken to spend his life in setting an example to others. As for the parish, did I not say it was solid—too solid? With you, and your father, and Quentin Fleming, all away, I have almost ceased to be human. Is not laughter the distinguishing characteristic of humanity?"

"Why did you not send for Dr. McKie?"

"I would have done so, but he and Cyril always fight. The Prayer Book versus the Shorter Catechism. Esmé Rusholme came over several times—not to see me. Twice we went to the palace. Once the Bishop came to us. We have been to three dinners and a concert. I don't know which was the worst."

"Who were at the dinners? The usual people, I suppose?"

"Yes—the usual marionettes. I should much prefer dining with ghosts. It would be less ruffling to one's natural vanity to sit at meat with spirits without bodies, than with bodies without spirits."

"Surely there were one or two spirits?"

"None. Really there was no one in the least entertaining."

"Not the Bishop? I am always entertained by the Bishop. His agility in

dodging conversational spears, and his skill in ruling men of differing religious views, incline me to think that he himself has no religion at all. Gallio is my ideal ruler, and Gallio cared for none of these things."

"Gallio was a sort of British Resident, or Chief Commissioner, wasn't he? My Biblical memory is not so good as it ought to be, but I recollect the Romans came out rather well on the whole. But why your ideal ruler, when your own religious opinions are not very far removed from Dr. McKie's severities?"

"I do not consider Gallio irreligious; and whether he was or not, one must needs admire capacity. He had a just discernment of the proportionate value of things. He impresses me as a strong man—one not to be moved by popular clamour."

"You are exactly like your father, Frances."

"Probably. I have noticed that most women are either very like or very unlike their fathers. But where are we going, Nina?"

"Going?" repeated Mrs. Paton, vaguely, looking round on the wide moor. They had turned into one of the narrow tracks crossing it from west to east. "I am sure I do not know where we are going. Will this path lead to the Moss Farm?"

"Certainly. It passes the gate."

"That will do. I have to take a parcel there for Cyril, a pastoral parcel, you understand, and I hoped you would come with me. The moor is so creepy, and Ralph Fleming's murder makes it worse than ever—more ghostly, I mean. People have talked about nothing else ever since."

"The moor is usually so safe that such a thing happening upon it naturally excites the whole country. Then, too, the

Flemings being so well known makes the interest greater. And the circumstances were very strange," concluded Frances, thoughtfully.

"There speaks that ferocious integrity I have noticed in you. It will not suffer you to express regret for such a worthless fellow as Ralph Fleming."

"When I spoke I was not thinking especially of Ralph Fleming, but of the manner of his death. Still, you are so far right that I cannot see why a lot of untruthful sentiment should be expressed immediately such a man is dead. If there is nothing good to be said, then say nothing at all. One can always keep silence."

"Can one? I daresay it is easy to you because you have chiefly lived here, and Wildersmoor seems to be perpetually laying an invisible finger on one's lips. Never was there a better background for queer misty horrors—like this murder, for

instance. There was nothing particularly horrid in the manner of it, the strangeness lies in the sequel: the blind man guiding the murderer through the fog, then finding the body. All that could have happened nowhere else save in this wild desolation, among these grim people with their noisy clogs. As you are not a native I permit myself these observations," added Nina, apologetically.

Frances laughed. She was used to these outbursts of Nina Paton's.

"If you had lived on Wildersmoor as a child you would not feel the place desolate, nor the people grim, and the clang of the wooden shoon would be as pleasant to your ears as the swish of the rain."

"It is," assented Nina, dryly. "I detest both."

"The people," Frances continued, "are like tiger-moths—silent, with black wings. Presently the black wings lift and you see

other wings underneath — the colour of flame."

"It may be so. Perhaps I have not tried to see the under wings. Perhaps they are never shown to the Vicar's wife, whose mental horizon is bounded on three sides by the parish and on the fourth by heaven."

"Your horizon, Nina, seems to me considerably wider than your description of it."

"Perhaps it has six sides, the extra two being the World and the Bottomless Pit; to which latter Cyril would assuredly believe me bound if he could hear me."

"Does he not hear you?"

"Never. Is it likely? Am I not married to him? Is it not always the man one marries who knows least about one? A husband is not a friend."

"Oh," said Frances, tentatively.

"No, he is not," persisted Nina. "That is a delusion of the unmarried. Everyone

has two sides, a pretty side and an ugly one. You only exhibit your pretty side to your husband; your friend sees both. That is the difference. Cyril thinks me a well-intentioned amiable woman, fairly sensible, and anxious to do her best. You know me as a biting, scratching, inquisitive, and discontented animal, and what a comfort that is! You may laugh, but it is true. One must sometimes appear without one's powder and curling-irons. Therein lies the blessedness of friendship. Ugliness, whether moral or physical, does not drive away a friend. Nothing drives away a friend but treachery."

"I see your meaning. Peter is pitied and pardoned; Judas goes to his own place."

"Precisely. And serve him right," said Mrs. Paton, with energy.

"Yet I perceive no reason why marriage should not be the highest friendship."

"Neither do I, except the eternal reason

that is always confounding all other reasons —because it isn't so. How did we arrive at this discussion, Frances?"

"It branched off from the Bishop's dinners, I think. Or the concert. I really forget. Do not all roads lead to Rome? All conversation, if long enough continued, ends either in marriage or death."

Mrs. Paton reflected.

"I do not see how you make that out."

"Well, I will put it another way. All conversation, if given time, ends in scandal or religion."

"I believe it does!" cried Nina, with a burst of laughter. "And I never noticed that. You solemn people are the observant ones."

"Am I solemn? Anyway, I am right in this. Whether the speakers are men or women, or men and women, makes no difference. Sooner or later they will drift towards one or the other of these topics.

It is natural. Marriage and death are the two serious facts of life, and people's thoughts circle round them."

"I suppose so," gloomily. "They might be called the twin shadows of life. They loom ahead from one's earliest childhood. 'You must marry — you must die.' To every fatherless woman the formula is slightly altered, 'You must marry or die.' Civilization and savagery alike say—'marry or starve.' Society and relatives alike cry —'live with a man or be pushed into a corner and drudge.' There are a few women who do neither of these things; only a few, and they are wealthy. Therefore for them the position is reversed."

"The world is changing," said Frances.

"It is. But it has not yet changed enough to give us freedom. If I had had twopence a year of my own I would have put on trews and tramped the earth. To wander—that had always a fascination for

me. To get out of the dreadful rut of ordinary life, to be rid of the ridiculous clockwork of regular meals and weekly washing, and the awful weariness of one's clothes and one's servants. A man, even though he be the biggest fool upon earth, can follow his natural bent. A woman cannot, as yet. As I did not care to drudge I married, and in that I have done well. Cyril is a good man, and I am teaching myself to forget how 'life runs large on the Long Trail.' I hope I make him a good wife. I am not so unreasonable as to bully him because circumstances married me to him. I look after his house well, see that he has good dinners, agree with him when I can and often pretend to when I cannot. What more could man desire? The combined housekeeper and echo has been the masculine ideal for centuries. Every man likes his wife to be the boy who follows the quack, beating a drum and crying—

'My master is the wisest man in the world!' People were better off in the old days. They had pilgrimages for their safety valves. When utter boredoom seized them they could leave house, husband, children, and wander away with a party of strangers to our Lady of This or That, returning home healed and restored."

"There are modern pilgrimages, and they are called Cook's Tours," remarked Frances.

"Ah, not the same thing. A Cook's tourist goes about with a telegraph-wire hitched to her belt, and public opinion waiting for her at home, seeking whom it may devour. Just now I am feeling life a burden. Suppose I suddenly took ship for Jaffa? What would happen? No sooner do I arrive than a telegram finds me—'Come home. Clothing Club wants you.' When I obey the summons, people do not flock to venerate me and hear my

adventures, but criticize my forsaking my duties. And rightly, too, for that matter. One must be free to be a pilgrim now-a-days."

"You mean that you recognize your responsibilities, but object that you were in a measure compelled to assume them. Is that it?"

"That is it precisely. I desired a celibate life and was not free to choose it. Could I have followed my natural bent, I should have been content. However, I am conscientiously trying to imitate the Indian devotees who hold up an arm till it stiffens. Their religious ideas command it; and so do mine. It is my duty to stiffen my mind; to swathe it with gowns, and servants, and society aims. Perhaps when Cyril is an aged Bishop, and I an aged Bishopess, I may be permitted a little wandering if I still care for it. Probably I shall not. No doubt by that time I shall

regard a big dinner as of far greater importance than the ruins of Baalbec."

Frances Aveland looked a moment at her friend, then turned her gaze over the moorland; where southward the Pike, clad in pale mist like a Viking in his grey wolfskins, towered over the wide land, keeping watch and guard.

In her mind arose the bitter words of a great writer of another land—a northern land wherein may be found a singular affinity of thought to that on Wildersmoor:—

"But all things die, even our memories; and our good and noble feelings die also, and in their place comes reason."

And when that age of reason sets in; when the eyes at last turn away from the Vision of the Delectable Mountains to the very tangible and ever-ready muck-rake, great is the rejoicing among the affectionate relatives of the reasonable one—for of

such is the Kingdom of Hell. Would Nina settle finally into the swathed mummy, the capable fashionable housewife? Her varying moods, her restlessness that—like the ferment in the wine—tended to better things, all vanished utterly; together with the light mocking gaiety, the quick sympathy and generous admiration of others that made up the personality of Nina Paton? There is no angel more beneficent, no spectre more terrible, than change.

CHAPTER VI.

WITH these thoughts rising like the moorland mists, Frances once more looked at her friend.

"I do not think that fate will overtake you, Nina. It need not. Seriously, what would do you good just now?"

"That was Macbeth's question, and there is no answer to it. If a square man is put into a round hole he naturally wriggles till his angles are rubbed off. By-and-by my angles will be rubbed off. Then I shall no longer wriggle. Already I find amusement in my social plotting. I

hope to see Cyril a Bishop, though he is rather too much in earnest to succeed in these days. I must cool him down a little."

"Do you think the cooling likely to be beneficial—or right?"

"Oh, my dear!—to succeed one must not consider what is right or wrong, but only what is expedient. There are only two classes of men who can afford to be high-minded—the millionnaire and the beggar. I was very high-minded when I was a beggar."

"I have not perceived any difference in you, Nina."

"That observation cuts both ways. Do you mean that I was never high-minded? Or that I still appear so? Anyway, I admire high-mindedness in others, which ought to be accounted to me for righteousness. Now, I have finished my grumbling for the present. Thanks for listening to

it all. You are a firstrate listener, Frances, and, what is still better, you never remind one of anything one has said. There is something peculiarly infuriating in having one's remarks hurled at one ages after they have been uttered and forgotten. Nobody is consistent save the bores. For instance, Esmé Rusholme is a perfectly consistent creature, and what a bore!"

"I dislike her myself, but I am sorry for her just now. There was a rumour that she would marry Ralph Fleming, and if that was true, his death is a great disappointment."

"Again, dear, I congratulate you on felicity of expression. 'A disappointment.' Precisely. And no more."

"Perhaps I ought not to have said that. I will say, a great trouble. But it was really so difficult to imagine Ralph Fleming inspiring any affection that one insensibly regarded him as a man who would be

married chiefly for his belongings. And I believe she would have managed him better than anyone else I can think of."

"Yes, she would," assented Mrs. Paton. "She is the sort of woman who would manage any man. Nobody could stir her one inch. Heaven and earth combined could not do it. There is not one spark of generosity in her."

"What has she been doing to ruffle you so, Nina?"

"Trying to make friends with me," aggrievedly.

"Perhaps she may be relenting towards Travis Crosier, and therefore seeks your society."

Travis Crosier was the North Rode curate.

"No," said Nina, decisively, "it is not Travis Crosier, though I intend her to marry him if I can possibly compass it. No, poor dear devoted Travis is not the

reason of Esmé's coming to teach in our Sunday School. The reason is simply Quentin Fleming. Esmé means to marry a rich man, and Ralph was ready to hand. Now he is gone, but his cousin remains. Esmé does not waste time in useless lamenting."

Nina shot a side glance at her companion as she said this. She wished to observe what effect it would have. A flash of colour came and went on Frances Aveland's face as suddenly as the Northern Lights. She said nothing, and Nina continued:

"It is perfectly absurd, of course. But Esmé Rusholme is one of those people who are not capable of seeing absurdity in anything that they do themselves." Here Nina added in her own mind, "and for that very reason they often succeed." Then aloud:

"It bores me dreadfully to have her

perpetually dropping in on Sundays ; though she has not been here for the last fortnight. Tired, I suppose, as Mr. Fleming did not appear. We have not seen him in the school since Christmas. You know how he often used to help us with the boys on Sunday afternoons."

Frances did know. Quentin used to walk over from the Hall after lunch, rejoice the Vicar's soul by appearing in the schoolroom, and reducing the most unruly boys to quiet behaviour ; and then by way of rewarding himself would finish the day by dining with the Avelands at Sandhayes. Neither Frances nor her father undertook instruction of youth. They were of that select company who decline to concern themselves with occupations for which nature has not fitted them.

"Are you short of teachers, Nina? because," smiling serenely, "I am afraid you will never get any help from Sandhayes."

"I am truly thankful we do not. Think how terrible it would be if we all talked 'shop' on Sunday evenings, which we should inevitably do if you and Dr. Aveland spent Sunday afternoons in the schoolroom. As things are now, your house gives us a fresh atmosphere. We are in no need of teachers. There are always Cyril, and myself, and Travis Crosier, and I daresay Mr. Fleming will help us again. Esmé is simply a disturbing element. She teaches well, there is no denying that; but she exasperates me. I dislike the type of girl, smooth-faced and treacherous, and, oh! so lucky—always so lucky! I wish you would help me to marry her to Travis Crosier."

Mrs. Paton spoke with intention. She could not perceive the delicate tones in the dusky northern landscape, nor the subtle harmonies in the hearts of its people; but she could see—and clearly—the drift of human lives, and the present state of affairs

between Sandhayes and the Hall appealed both to her sympathies and her self-interest. If Frances Aveland married Quentin Fleming, his influence would give Cyril Paton an upward lift. The Vicar of North Rode had usually been lucky in getting preferment, and Nina had no mind to spend her life in parish work and obscurity. Also, she was sincerely attached to her friend, and Quentin Fleming was really the very nicest fellow, and such a good match.

Perhaps marrying an old playmate is a somewhat matter of fact proceeding, but Nina hoped Frances would not look at it in this light. Quentin was such an exceptional old playmate, the marriage would be so suitable, and so useful. A little while ago everything seemed to be going smoothly. Now here was Esmé, scheming, cautious, determined. Mrs. Paton knew well how often men have

been induced to marry one woman even while preferring another. "She will flatter him," thought Nina. "She will be always on the spot. She will more than hint she adores him, and then he will marry her out of compassion, and because he does not know whether Frances cares or not. How tiresome it all is! How I wish I could induce her to take a reasonable everyday view of things and do a little scheming on her own account. But she never will. She will give a rival every possible chance, from sheer pride." And Nina fell into gloomy reverie, picturing the future in colours as sombre as Woffendale. Dr. Aveland dead, Frances gone — for it seemed hardly probable that she would remain at Sandhayes after her father's death; Esmé reigning at the Hall and studiously ignoring North Rode; Quentin Fleming grown morose — Nina felt sure he would grow morose if he married the wrong woman.

What a prospect for herself, Nina! Her friend's voice broke in upon these melancholy forebodings.

"Do not look so wretched, dear. Such an expression of countenance would best befit the unhappy man on whom you propose to confer such a doubtful benefit as Esmé Rusholme."

"You are mistaken. Mr. Crosier would be perfectly happy with her, and she would make him an excellent wife. The only way to render an obnoxious woman harmless is to marry her to a man who will neither sink nor rise. Sinking would exasperate her; rising would give her too much power. Reasonable comfort is the great paralyzer. She does not like either you or me, and that sort of person is apt to cause annoyance in a country place, therefore, I shall help Travis Crosier all I can. By-and-by he will get a living and away they will go."

Frances Aveland's black brows went up into her hair.

"Is it worth while, Nina?"

"I think so. To me it is. I know what you mean. You do not care for these counter moves. You take no heed of an enemy, if you have one. You walk on serenely through the scrimmage of life. If you were hit you would walk on just the same. Now, I see the attack coming, and do my best to avert it. Failing that, I hit back."

"But it does not appear to me that there is any attack to speak of."

"Not to speak of, perhaps," replied Mrs. Paton, slowly. Then, after a pause, she asked, "Do you ever think of the future, Frances?"

"Very often, and to very little purpose. How can one say one will do this or that or the other? Of all things one's own life is least under one's own control, be-

cause it so depends upon the lives of others."

"Not more than their lives depend upon us. For instance, you, Frances, influence other lives more than they do yours. There is Jack Ulyett. He was solidly in love with you. So much so that it made him clear-sighted enough to perceive what a miserable idiot he was, and gave him strength to keep his useless feelings to himself. I do not care for scamps, as a rule. They are hopelessly out of date—like the smart highwaymen our great-great-grandmothers used to admire. But there was really something attractive about that man, and the way in which he haunted our house merely to hear me talk of you was quite pathetic. There is a proof that you influence others more than they do you, for you never gave a thought to that poor fellow."

"Oh, I liked Mr. Ulyett. He used to

come with Quentin and talk to father. He had quite a gift that way."

"For talking to your father? I daresay. Poor Jack always struck me as being a loyal soul, and he and Quentin Fleming seemed to be good friends."

Here Nina congratulated herself on having arrived at another significant point in the conversation. In vain. It did not bring the confidence she hoped for. Frances merely asked, with a flash of amusement in her eyes:

"What do you expect me to say?"

"Nothing! Nothing!" cried the other, hastily. "But I think you are tolerably certain to marry sooner or later, and I do hope you will marry well and happily in every sense of both words; for then you will be a shining light, you will do good unconsciously in all sorts of ways. Most married women are detestable. You will not be. You seem to me the ideal matron—

woman's ideal matron, not man's. It is only natural that I should hope you may have plenty of soft cushions between you and the world, and nothing particular ever happening to you. It is so much better not to have anything particular happening in one's life, and, somehow, you impress me as a woman who might have tragic happenings : a sort of captive Andromache, you know."

"I like to hear you singing the praises of a placid life, Nina, you whose soul is akin to a comet and would enjoy an equally erratic orbit."

"I am different," said Mrs. Paton, in tones of conviction. "Wherever I went, nothing particular would happen to me. My existence could not be dramatic. It was never intended to be dramatic. Fate would pass me over as a mouse too small to be worth catching—a soubrette on life's stage. But there are people who should

be kept out of the turmoil, if possible. They seem to attract difficulties as a magnet draws iron filings."

"Are you not a trifle contradictory? If an individual is destined to trouble, assuredly he or she will not escape it. One must dree one's weird as best one may. Again, if a sheltered life has the deteriorating effect ascribed to it, surely it is better to live unsheltered. For what can it profit man or woman to gain the whole world and lose their own soul?"

Nina looked at her friend's face; beautiful, smiling, half-jesting, wholly earnest, with its delicate contours and lovely bloom; the clear grey eyes contrasting so singularly with their black lashes and the black brows above them, and the crown of silky black hair. Nina looked and appreciated all that she saw, for a woman is no mean judge of another woman's beauty.

"You mistake me," she replied, gravely.

"Did I say a troubled life was good? I did not mean it. Nothing evil is good, and trouble is evil. People whose own lives are comfortable always talk as though adversity were a magic crucible: you throw in base metal and it comes out gold. Nothing of the sort. The base metal remains base metal. The men and women who have passed through that crucible and come out gold were gold before they fell in. The furnace is just so much wear and tear. That is all."

"Ah, that is not so certain. The gold may have been obscured by much dross before it arrived at the crucible. Perhaps evil has its uses. Perhaps, by its clashing with good it helps to develop such fine characters out of the chaos, as the unrest of the sea keeps it sweet."

Mrs. Paton shook her head.

"How about the drowned and the maimed? No—no, you will never persuade

me to 'beckit to the deil' in that fashion. That is the way people justify all kinds of iniquity, by saying it is wholesome for somebody or other. They seem to suppose that sort of argument ends the matter. Nobody inquires whether it is wholesome for the victims. They have no rights. But I am like Sydney Smith, I always want to hear the lion's version of the story. Therefore, Frances, I hope you will have a life free from evil and trouble. How I wish you would choose someone near," this was the nearest approach Nina dared make to the name of Quentin Fleming. "Of course, it is all pure selfishness on my part. What would become of me if I were left alone at North Rode? Do think of what I say though I have no right to say it. Don't waste your life either in feeding the pigs at Sandhayes or in throwing it away on someone unworthy."

"Most people are wasted," said Frances.

"They are," gloomily, "when there is anything in them. Was not Greek statuary burnt to make lime? But that is no reason why you should be wasted."

"And as for the poor pigs," Frances continued, a laugh in her voice, "why should you scorn our dear little Berkshires? We take pride in our black pigs."

"Well, I think you and your father the most delightful creatures upon earth, but when it comes to 'love me—love my pig,' I cry off. My sympathies are not Catholic enough to include the Berkshires. Here is the farm. Will you come in with me?"

"If you wish, though I think you will bestow your pastoral benediction better without me."

"Perhaps," Nina assented. "I might be less embarrassed. Besides, my personality is more impressive when you are not

by. I hardly like to ask you to wait for me, but I shall not be more than ten minutes."

"Of course I will wait. I will walk up and down here and watch Malise chase the festive rabbit."

"Thank you. I will be less than ten minutes."

Mrs. Paton walked up the straggling path leading to the farm-house, backed by its barns and outbuildings. Behind it, northward, the ground rose slightly, and here were cultivated fields; some brown and bare, waiting for the sower; some green meadowland. There was a fluttering of fowls, a whirl of pigeons, a barking of dogs, this last vigorously echoed by Malise; but of these sounds Nina heard none. She was busy pondering her own wisdom in discussing the future with Frances Aveland.

"I wonder," she thought, "if I have done right in speaking? Probably not.

In these matters one is always wrong. Why must one always meddle with one's friends' marriages? Perhaps I had better have urged her not to marry Quentin Fleming. Then the perversity of human nature would have fixed her mind firmly upon him. Most likely she will snub him now, and he will have to go on all fours to soften her. And suppose he doesn't! I wish I had said nothing about Esmé. However, I will marry her to Travis Crosier, that I am determined to do. I wonder if there is anybody about here who has a distant living in his gift. I have a great mind to —— " Here the heavy farm-house door was opened by a buxom woman, comely and smiling, with the fresh colour characteristic of the natives of that mild damp coast; and Mrs. Paton's thoughts turned into a ministering channel.

CHAPTER VII.

LEFT alone, Frances paced slowly to and fro at a little distance from the farm gate; now and then reproving the terrier, who with one eye on his mistress, made dashes at the rabbits that were cheerfully scurrying about—cheerfully, because on Wildersmoor the rabbits were fed in severe weather, not left to starve as is the usual practice.

From the farm came sounds of human life, but sound does not travel well on this part of the west coast, so that these were scarcely audible where Frances walked. Instead, the sounds of the moor made

themselves heard. The approaching thaw was already releasing the earth. Here and there a handful of frozen snow slipped from willow and bramble, and fell with a soft pad like a leopard's footfall. Faint airs from the sea stirred in the withered fern, and it rustled eerily, as though the dead Legions were marching over it once more to meet the Briton on his own camping-ground. The frozen pools showed surface glistening in the chill sunshine, and birds twittered in joyful anticipation. There was much bird life on the moor. To those clear sea-grey eyes of Frances Aveland there was much of all beauty on Wildersmoor, quite apart from the fact that Wildersmoor Hall stood upon its farthest verge. But certainly Quentin Fleming added interest to those miles of heather, and bog, and peat. He was a point of thought in the far distance. She could not look towards the Pike without being reminded of

him and his goings to and fro. For Quentin came and went continually between the Hall and Sandhayes, walking or riding over at any hour, and—like a true Lancashire man—in any weather. Did the familiar rain fall in a persistent drizzle, or did an Atlantic gale sweep wet-winged over the sandhills and across the moor, then it was tolerably certain that as twilight deepened a gust of rain and wind would, as it were, blow Fleming into the hall at Sandhayes; laughing, shaking the water-drops off his great-coat, bringing in with him the breath of the strong sea-wind that sang without in the night.

This abounding vitality, born of the out-door life lived by himself and his fathers, and accompanied—as it often is—by an honourable simplicity of character, made Quentin's a very attractive personality. There is a sense of rest—of exhilaration, in meeting one who has dwelt

near enough to Mother Nature to have drunk of the wine of her joyous steadfastness. Therefore the master of Wildersmoor was welcome at Sandhayes. Just now, however, there was a shadow on Frances Aveland's face as her glance fell on the grey hill that marked Quentin's home. Attached though she was to Nina, she yet wished that some subjects—Fleming being one—might be left to silence. Nina meant well, excellently well; and the result was the usual result of meaning well. Frances turned her eyes westward, where no misty hill rose above the horizon; only the grey level line of the sea ended the wide stretch of undulating moor. There was the dark larch wood behind Sandhayes, hiding the homestead from sight, and further to the right, the village and the square tower of the church. The girl's gaze dwelt on these lovingly — half-unconsciously, while her mind recalled Nina's attempts at advice.

Over Esmé, Frances compelled her thoughts to pass lightly. Nina always had theories of what this or that person intended. In any case, pride forbade Frances either to acknowledge a rival or to take any steps to defeat her.

The incessant social plotting by which so many men and women gain the prizes of this world, was impossible to this girl reared between moor and sea. It is true that numberless human creatures are reared under very similar conditions, who are no more influenced by the earth and sky around them than if they had been bred in one of the gigantic dustbins that men call cities.

But Frances was of a silent reflective nature, and the spirit of Wildersmoor sank deeply into her mind as the peat tinges the burn. And the very spirit of that strip of grey north-west coast is an absence of littleness. In that the moor is like Death.

For after wandering on it awhile, one's thoughts of one's friends and acquaintances insensibly change. Their images come before the mental vision as those of beings very far removed; having sloughed away their earthly garments of error, of senseless brutal strivings, appearing only in very pitiful guise, as penitent spirits needing pardon. On Wildersmoor there may be tragedies, there cannot be trivialities; the sombre genius of the place forbids them. One may see the pillar of fire in the wilderness; for piping and dancing one needs the market-place. Therefore, as Frances Aveland looked on the familiar moorland, her slight resentment melted away, melted into bird-voices and coming of spring, as the snow was dissolving in the warmer air. Nina Paton was a loyal friend; sometimes even the most loyal friends make mistakes when they try, in all good faith, to order our lives. Their

mistakes may be forgotten when the loyalty is so steadfast. For Esmé Rusholme—Frances had never liked Esmé. When one is conscious of insuperable antagonism towards an individual, it is wisdom to avoid that individual; to walk—if you both can—on parallel paths of life. For if those paths converge the result will be collision, and unfortunately the coarser nature generally gets the best of it. Frances had instinctively tried to walk parallel with Esmé; had also tried to ignore the warning of her own intuitions. Now she set herself a further task: to forget Nina's opinions, to forget the question presented to her by Mrs. Paton. If Esmé chose to come often to North Rode, it was not for Frances to analyze her reasons—still less to take any action in consequence. There is a certain degradation in being dragged into the whirlpool of petty scheming that exists in every town, big or little. From this

Aveland's daughter turned resolutely away; perhaps with the greater ease because an inward voice whispered that whatever thoughts might dwell in Esmé Rusholme's mind they were not likely to find an echo in Quentin Fleming's.

The moments drifted by unheeded. It is only man who makes time—like all else—a worry and a burden, and doles it out threateningly by minutes. Away from humanity there is always plenty of time. On Wildersmoor one was only conscious of Nature's gracious divisions of morning, noon, and night, each melting imperceptibly into the other; not marked by infuriating ticking and clangour of the pit, but by gradual changes of light and soothing voices of earth and sea: for, say the old philosophers, the pulse of the world is sleep; the rhythm of the world as the sphere swings onward in its orbit, is sleep; and thus comes the healing gift of open-air

solitude: it is the rocking of the cradle, the lullaby of the ancient Nurse.

Presently a figure appeared in the distance, seaward; a woman, bent, and carrying a basket: Granny Darlow, surely. She sometimes came to gather cockles on North Rode beach when a friendly farmer gave her a lift in his cart thither. As Frances watched the old woman moving slowly along, the click of the farm gate announced Mrs. Paton's return.

"Have I been long?" she asked. "I am ashamed that you should wait for me, but I am grateful. Who is that old creature? I have seen her two or three times about here."

"That is Granny Darlow. She lives near the Hall, next door to Blind John. I daresay she has been cockle-gathering. Now she will walk home, seven miles."

And Frances drew out her purse.

"Are you going to bestow a trifle on

her to make her walk easier? I would give her something, too, but I have not my purse with me. Never expected to want it in these wilds."

"This will do. It is such a satisfaction to me that Granny never wears a bonnet. If she did, I should experience a shock. A bonnet is prosaic and amenable to ordinary laws, whereas Granny is neither prosaic nor amenable. I rejoice to see that she has sufficient sense of the fitness of things to cover her head with the hood of that blue cloak. It is a picturesque garment. Do you not think so, Nina?"

Mrs. Paton eyed the bent old figure, now quite near.

"Decidedly witch-like. Does she come to church in that hooded cloak? I do not remember to have seen her there."

People with flexible brows have usually a sense of humour, and the brows express

it. Just now Frances Aveland's brows expressed a good deal.

"I am afraid, dear, that Granny Darlow's religious views are fashioned like the gargoyles—to remain outside."

"Are Granny's views so startling? I should like——"

Nina checked herself. They were close to the old woman, who calmly surveyed them, her keen black eyes resting longest on Frances. She took the gift of money with thanks, and observed that she had inquired in the village after Dr. Aveland's health.

"My father is rather better," said Frances.

"Ay, so I heerd. That's as it should be."

Then Nina spoke.

"You Wildersmoor people are very weather-wise. There seems to be a wind rising. Shall we have rain, do you think?"

Granny looked, not at the sky and the distant sea, but at the speaker.

"I mind thy face right well," she said; "thou art th' parson's wife. Earth weather's nowt to worrit o'er. It's th' weather o' folks' lives as matters. I've known toimes when I couldna ha' told whether it wur storm or shine, night or day. But tha'll never know toimes like those." A slight smile flickered over the wrinkled visage. "Never," she repeated, emphatically; "tha'll allus be able to tell whether it's wet or dry, hot or cold."

"Have you had much trouble in your life? Would you like Mr. Paton to call on you?"

Nina spoke partly from a sense of duty, wifely and clerical; partly because it was politic to conciliate everyone, high or low; partly, also, from real interest in this bent old crone with those strange bright eyes gleaming under the withered brow with its crown of thick white hair. Yet, as

Nina uttered the words, she felt an intuitive sense of incongruity, and Granny's black eyes met hers with a subtle derision in their depths.

"Th' parson?" she said, and the subtle derision of her glance was echoed in her voice. "I reckon I could teach him summat, if so be as he'd th' sense to learn. What con men-folk teach women, I'd loike to know? An' what ha' men-folk to do wi' women's troubles, barrin' th' making on 'em? That's th' men's job, th' tangling o' th' skein fur th' woman to unravel. Never a mon has th' wit nor patience to undo it hissen; he just casts it down an' runs away. Then parson cooms an' tells th' woman it's a' her doing. That's the men!—I know 'em."

She paused, leaning both hands on her stick. Mrs. Paton, taken aback, glanced at Frances for assistance, and, receiving none, said, rather vaguely:

"I thought, perhaps, you needed consolation."

"Nay, I dunnot. Tha means well, but what dost thou think I want consoling fur? Nowt, barrin' owd age, an' theer's no consoling fur that. Eh, if I'd my toime to coom o'er again, I'd make th' most on it—ay, I would! Fur th' best on it soon goes, an' you conna tell what's to coom after, fur a' parsons say. Happen it'll be better nor one thinks, happen it willna; but, better or no, it conna be better than th' best o' this life here. An' so I say to a' lasses, make th' most on it."

"I do not know what my husband would say to that."

"I know reet well what he'd say," responded Granny, calmly. "Parsons allus make out as folk are a' cut out o' th' same piece o' cloth, an' a' th' same pattern. You mun think this, an' you mun think that, an' you munnot feel owt. An' if you tell 'em

th' Lord made a sight o' difference betwixt th' sea an' yon pond, they say it's a' water, an' th' one mout be as quoiet as th' other if it loiked. That's parsons, that is! Ay, an' most other folk, too. I hannot patience wi' 'em."

Light clouds were drifting up from the west, though the sun still shone from a wide rift of blue, catching the old woman's worn wedding-ring as her withered hands clasped the knob of the stick on which she leant.

"I suppose," said Nina, as the glitter of the gold caught her eye, "that you have been a widow many years?"

A brighter glitter came into the keen old eyes.

"Nay. It wur fur a blue-eyed mon o' Wildersmoor that I turned o'er a fisher-lad as had never a thowt but fur me. An' I had never a thowt but fur th' other. That's mostly th' way o' things. An'

afore I'd wedded him a year I wur thinkin' o' making a brew o' the moss-plants as would ha' rid me of him safe enow. I dunnot know as I wouldna ha' done it too if he hadna gone off and never troubled me more. I dunnot know wheer he went to. I never heard."

"And the fisherman?"

Granny Darlow shut her mouth tightly.

"Nay, that's neither here nor theer."

She turned with a swift bird-like movement to Frances, who had been a silent observant listener.

"Lass, I wish thee good luck in life, but wishes dunnot allus make it coom. See here, if ever owt troubles thee, if ever theer's a tangle as tha conna undo, tha con either fetch me or coom to me—which ever tha likes—an' I'll fettle it. I'm nigh on eighty, but theer's many a year o' life in me yet. When tha wants me I'll be theer."

Granny was old and poor, white-haired, bent, and shrivelled: all the vitality in her seeming concentrated in the glittering black eyes. Yet her words conveyed a sense of power, of capacity to carry out that which she professed. One felt that if she could not openly slay her Philistines, she would certainly contrive to pull the roof about their ears, even at the risk of involving herself in the common ruin. She inspired belief in her steadfastness; equally responsive, to the utmost of her capacity, to a demand made now or ten years hence.

Nina drew back a little; Granny's dæmonic influence disturbed her. There was something uncanny about this old woman.

"Thank you," said Frances, "I will remember."

And Granny appeared content with the manner in which her offer was received.

"Tha con depend on me," she said,

pulling the hood of her cloak more over her face. "Good-day."

"Good-day," said Frances, and Granny hobbled away more actively than one would have thought possible for her years.

"My dear!" ejaculated Nina, turning to look after the retreating figure, "that Wildersmoor product is the most alarming of any. Did you notice what she said of me? She is right. I am not a Woman; I am an Intelligence. Just that and nothing more. But Granny is the only individual who has had the sense to perceive that. Tell me her story. Why did her husband leave her? And what about the fisherman?"

"The moor people tell strange tales of her. Shall you repeat them to Mr. Paton? Because," with a half-laughing glance, "I should be sorry to bring ecclesiastical censure on poor Granny. Besides, the stories may not be true."

"You may feel quite secure about your

pet witch. The greater the sinner the more I should strive to conceal from Cyril that sinner's peccadilloes, lest he should rake up some obsolete form of church discipline and thereby make a spectacle of himself. Also, as sinners form the majority, it is best to be on friendly terms with them."

"Well, the story goes that Granny's husband never ran away. People say that she incited the fisherman to murder him and hide him in one of the moor pools."

"What!" Mrs. Paton stopped, fairly aghast. "Do you think it is true? I don't believe it."

"Such is the depravity of human nature," Frances replied, "that I am afraid I should be rather disappointed if it were not true. While one believes it — I am strongly inclined to believe it — Granny Darlow is an interesting book into which one has had only a peep and of which one wishes to read more. Whereas, if the story

is mere idle gossip, Granny Darlow becomes decidedly more estimable, but decidedly less picturesque."

"I do not know," murmured Nina, doubtfully. Notwithstanding her general freedom of opinion, this amazing tale of Granny Darlow's youth had really shocked her.

Frances looked at her friend, smiled, and said :

"Now here is a strange thing. How differently the same things affect people. I see you are quite horror-stricken at poor Granny, while she interests me."

"Dreadful old creature!" with another backward glance at the little bent figure still visible among the dead bracken. "If it is true she ought to be taken up by the police."

"It is a long, long while ago, Nina ; and there is so much dry stunted vegetation in the human forest that when one comes

across a burning bush one must needs stand and wonder."

"Burning with very unholy fire," said Nina.

"I am not sure that the flame of Granny Darlow's spirit is unholy in itself," persisted Frances. "It may, by reason of ignorance, have lent itself to base purposes; but it seems to me too fierce, too enduring a flame to be wholly evil. Not the flame of Hell, but the flame of Purgatory, which, you know, Dante puts at white heat."

"Your favourite, Hawthorne, says that rampant unrestraint is the characteristic of wickedness."

"But was Granny's unrestraint rampant? Hawthorne would have rejoiced in her. She would have been another portrait in that weird gallery of his."

"I am surprised that the old woman should ever allude to her past," continued Mrs. Paton, musingly.

"Doubtless she was very silent when there was need for silence. Now she is so old that nothing she says matters."

The grey clouds covered the sky, yet the air was distinctly warmer. The faint wind was waxing in strength, and blowing in fitful little gusts. Nina looked at the glistening pools and shuddered. In which of them whitened the bones of the murdered man?

"I suppose," she said, "Granny was like the man who believed he had bought an Amati, and smashed it when he found it was only a common fiddle—one of a dozen made by John Smith. Yet how could the fiddle help it? These questions are too much for me; but if Granny's story is true, it proves the truth of all I say of Wildersmoor. Where else could you find such a murderous old witch?"

"In Æschylus, perhaps; or the Icelandic Sagas. There is a combined sim-

plicity and terribleness about the people here that often reminds me of those old tragedies. Their fatalism completes the resemblance."

"The whole place is a nightmare," Nina declared, emphatically, as the clipped yews and red roof of Sandhayes came in sight. "It is a nightmare, and the people dance to the tune of Tartini's dream."

Frances laughed.

"Tartini's dream interests me," she said.

CHAPTER VIII.

THERE was little garden in front at Sandhayes. Merely a mossy lawn, with a large heart-shaped bed now gay with crocuses. A short broad gravel drive, a narrow fringe of shrubbery, then the wide road, the sand-hills, and the sea. At the back of the house the garden expanded, and winding box-bordered paths led from the house in various directions, reaching their respective goals in odd erratic manner. One path plunged through the orchard into the farm-yard; another apparently intended to lead strollers on to the moor, for it advanced

to the low thorn hedge dividing garden from moorland, then seeming to change its mind, retreated at an acute angle, meandered awhile among gooseberry bushes, and finally terminated its career at a summer-house as solidly constructed as that one in which Chaucer spent the summer night that he might see the daisies open at dawn. Close behind the summer-house a white gate opened into the large plantation. This path was the one Frances preferred, particularly in spring. She liked to sit in the rustic shelter and listen to the riotous singing of birds as they swung in the larches; while the perpetual hiss and rush of the sea filled the air with its accompanying undersong. There was much bird-singing in the wood to-day, but the Avelands, father and daughter, were strolling round the farm. There was just time to do this between lunch and the first drops of the threatening rain.

They walked slowly, stopping now and then, heralded by the terrier Malise and escorted by Ptolemy, a stately cat with coat of glossy black and lustrous aqua-marine eyes, who, according to feline custom, followed his mistress everywhere about Sandhayes, but not beyond; daintily sniffing at the crocuses bordering the path and regarding the gyrations of Malise with serene contempt,

Presently the little procession arrived at a walled enclosure originally intended for a cow-yard, but now containing some thirty black Berkshire pigs contentedly running about. Aveland leant his arms on the gate and contemplated them with much satisfaction. He prided himself on his Berkshires.

"They look well," he observed. "McKie said so this morning."

"Was Dr. McKie here this morning? I am sorry I was out."

"He inquired after you. I asked him to dine with us, as he said he had to see a patient on the moor this evening."

Dr. Aveland was a short man with broad shoulders, and a grave reflective expression, the same expression that was echoed in his daughter's face. There was a strong resemblance between them. Both had the same black hair—poppy-heart black, in Aveland's case thickly streaked with grey; the same straight black brows and finely-cut features, but Aveland's eyes were as dark as his hair, not the clear grey that shone so unexpectedly beneath his child's black lashes.

"Perhaps Nina and Mr. Paton may come in later," said Frances. "They are going to Riverton this afternoon and will not be home till eight."

"Missionary meeting, isn't it? Paton said something about it. He came with McKie and we had a look round. Not that

Paton is interested in the farm. There's where he fails as a country parson. He has no eye for the weight of a pig or the state of the crops. He would do better in a town. Not a bad sort of fellow."

Frances contemplated the Berkshires in silence for a moment or two.

"I really must try to convert Nina to the beauties of pig-keeping," she said. "It has the double merit of antiquity and ease. Father, do you think a placid life the best?"

When Aveland felt amused, two or three horizontal wrinkles showed themselves in his forehead. They were visible now as he raised himself from his leaning attitude and regarded his daughter.

"Does your question refer to the pigs or to Mrs. Paton?"

"To neither. It refers to people generally."

Frances was recalling Nina Paton's

words of the morning. Her father, however, had no clue to what was passing in her mind, and he tried painfully to guess the reason of her question. Knowing his own days were numbered, he earnestly desired a fair haven for his child, in which her life's barque might ride out in safety this world's storms. Such a haven he saw, or thought he saw, in a marriage with his old friend's son, Quentin Fleming. The young man's feelings Aveland had long ago discerned clearly enough, but his daughter was more complex. What did she mean by a placid life? A life of ease and wealth passed with Quentin at the old Hall overlooking the familiar moor? Aveland shaped his reply accordingly.

"I think a placid life is usually the happiest," he said as they turned back to the house. "What does Verga say of the sweetness of the old familiar place, 'where even the very stones are one's friends, and

where at night the lights shine out from the rooms where one has known all those one loves best.' Yes, my dear, to me a placid life seems most to be desired. It gives time for thought, for study, for enjoyment of earth and sky, for many things that are lost in turmoil."

"Yet turmoil brings out many good things that would otherwise be lost." Frances spoke meditatively, looking through the leafless trees at the faint sea-line.

"That is true. As the sea-gull grows strong-winged and the fisherman stout-hearted. But to my ears the hum of bees and the twitter of the goldfinch are sweeter than the sea-gull's scream; and while the fisherman's heart is being strengthened, his wife's face is pale and his children cry." Aveland paused a moment, then resumed: "My dear, I can give you no better advice than Thoreau's, 'follow the bent of your genius closely.' Be yourself, not a weak

imitation of someone else. If you are sure that your wing is as untiring as the sea-gull's, well and good. But it seems to me that peace is infinitely better than strength gained by battling with the storm. Of course," he added, with a smile, "I am speaking as one who has faced the tempest and grown weary. Perhaps had I never done so I might feel differently, though I do not believe I should. Do you feel this place monotonous, my dear?"

"I? Oh, no. Not in the least." Frances spoke with real surprise. The idea of monotony had never occurred to her in connection with Wildersmoor. "Not in the least," she repeated, turning luminous grey eyes upon her father—eyes that echoed the smile that was curving her lips. "Other places are apt to become dull. This never."

She did not, however, explain why she had brought up the question of a placid life, and Aveland walked on thoughtfully,

his hands clasped loosely behind his back.

"I am glad you are content here," he said. Then a memory came over him of the South; the blue sky, the heat, the white dust, the scent of pink hyacinths, a row of yellow hives on a whitewashed bench, dazzling in the sun. All that he liked better—far better than this sombre moor, and when illness seized him he would have returned to that village of his childhood had not his daughter existed. For her sake he spent his last years at Sandhayes, for what can a young life do cooped up in a country village with none but village folk around? Must it wither uselessly, all its possibilities wasted as the trodden grass by the roadside? Or must it rush friendless into the great world? When Aveland spoke of the exceeding good of a placid life he did not mean a stifled one. On Wildersmoor there was

no stifling. There is ever a wide outlook in the north, and it is better to be free under a grey sky than a prisoner under a blue.

These thoughts passed, as they often did, vaguely through Aveland's mind, and his daughter's next words oddly echoed them.

"I like the sense of freedom that Wildersmoor gives," she said. "There is no walling in. Here the moorland ends with the sea, and there in a hundred roads that flow away into the country. Elsewhere I feel cramped. Evidently I have a natural leaning towards the desert and the steppe, and anything that remotely resembles them."

Her father nodded.

"I understand. I should be well pleased if I could know you would always live on this moorland. But no man can control events when he is gone."

"Do not say that, father," slipping a firm round arm within his.

He looked at her with regretful tenderness.

"It must come some day, Frances. There must come a time when I shall be no longer here to advise or to modify the course of events. I earnestly hope your life may be a serene one, for you seem to me a plant that will thrive best in a still atmosphere. But we are talking so seriously that we have forgotten to visit the fowls."

Aveland looked pale and weary, so that his daughter took alarm, and, refusing to interview the fowls, swept him indoors and into a deep arm-chair that stood by the seaward window in the dining-room. For the Sandhayes dining-room was not the melancholy modern feeding-room with its chill air of disuse: it was a light and cheerful apartment in tones of tawny yellow and brown, and with two windows, one looking across the sandhills to where the sea, the great grey cat of Northern legend,

stretched white paws of foam over the pebbles, clawing, gathering, with soft murmuring purr and slumberous growl; the other window was by the fireplace, and commanded a wide view of the moor southward, with the Pike in the far distance. Through this window in the winter one could see Orion rise night after night with glittering belt and shield, unchanged as when he shone over Chaldea and was called Nimrod. The far end of the room was taken up by bookshelves. At Sandhayes there were books everywhere. "Why do you wish to set apart one room as a library?" Aveland would say, "Your whole house ought to be your library." For the rest, there were cosy corners and comfortable chairs, a carved oak settle by the large fireplace—all old fireplaces are large in the north; a few bronzes, two tall lamps with scarlet shades, and the general air of home that only comes to a room

when it is constantly inhabited. Across the stone-flagged hall there was, indeed, a little drawing-room, all pink and crimson like a Rosamond pæony, and also with a seaward window; but in the long dining-room most of the day was passed, and, accordingly, it wore always an aspect of comfort and welcome.

"Ptolemy wants his cream," said Frances, stroking the cat's black head as he sat expectantly on his own particular cushion in the deep window-seat. "I shall not give you any tea, father; I will bring you some wine instead."

Aveland assented and leant back, watching his daughter's soft movements hither and thither.

"It is pleasant to be among one's belongings again," he said, glancing round the room. "The chief delight of going away is the coming home. Curious how one becomes attached to one's impedimenta."

Frances laughed.

"Nina once confided to me that she had a violent desire to throw all the Vicarage chairs out of the window. It seemed so terrible to her that she might possibly sit in those same chairs for twenty years."

"I can understand her. Once I too felt like that. Mrs. Paton is an amusing woman. I like her extremely. She appears to me to be one who would not fail in emergency nor forsake in poverty, as most people do."

"I am sure Nina would not forsake a friend because that friend was poor," said Frances, slowly, ministering the while to the patient bright-eyed spirits on either side of her: a saucer of cream for Ptolemy, a sweet biscuit for Malise. "Also, she would permit poverty to retain its individuality."

"That is a subtle distinction, and one which I should not have expected you to hit upon."

"Why not? I have noticed that everyone tries to destroy individuality in others, and poverty offers such a good chance for trampling it out, or trying to trample it out. But Nina is too original herself to wish to destroy originality in others."

"One's children are singular echoes sometimes," Aveland said, reflectively, "echoes of one's own long-past feelings and aspirations. You often utter thoughts, Frances, that I have brooded over as a younger man. I could imagine strange unconscious vengeance coming that way. A parent—father or mother—oppressed and too helpless to retort, and the fierce suppressed bitterness blazing out long years after in the child who is the destined avenger."

A little silence, save for the cheerful babble of the fire and the rush and roar of the sea. That rush sounded more clearly now, for the tide had turned and a

westerly wind was helping it, so that the white foam-paws of the grey sea-cat ran swiftly round and over the sandhills in terrible resistless playfulness. How our Viking ancestors loved that same grey cat! As mighty hunters were laid in their tombs with favourite dog and horse, so the old sea-kings must needs have sea burial; that ever those soft white paws might guard their whitening bones, and the murmuring purr and savage growl be their ceaseless requiem.

Ptolemy, the mere flesh and blood feline, having finished his saucer of cream by licking it round in neat and workmanlike fashion, humped his back, sat down, washed his face, then sprang lightly as thistledown on the arm of Aveland's chair, where he crouched and watched with half-shut eyes Malise begging for more sugar and biscuits. Darker masses of cloud came rolling up from the west, and the leafless honey-

suckle on the porch stretched out long brown fingers, tapping on the window as the rising wind tossed its tangled stems. A few heavy drops of rain fell. The wind changed its character and came in gusts. A strong gale was blowing up.

"Do you hear wheels, father?"

Aveland listened a moment.

"I think so," he said. "Very likely it is Quentin."

It was Quentin. In a few minutes he stood in the doorway, a tall and stately figure, like young Tamlin in the old ballad, bringing with him into the warm flower-scented atmosphere a breath of the wet freshness of moor and sea.

"A regular thaw, is it not?" he said, shaking hands. "How did you get home last night? Not too tired by the journey? Hullo, Malise, old fellow!" He patted the terrier, and softly pulled Ptolemy's left ear, who acknowledged the attention by a

little gurgle—animals instinctively appreciated Fleming.

"Father is tired, though he will not acknowledge it," said Frances. "How is it that we hear wheels, and yet you arrive on foot? And where is your familiar?"

"My familiar has muddy paws, so I have left him outside. I walked from the village and sent the dog-cart on. I rather imagine, Dr. Aveland, that it has taken shelter in your barn."

Aveland rang the bell.

"I'll have the horse taken out. You will stay and dine with us, Quentin?"

"Thank you. I shall be very glad. I don't whoop for joy when I sit down to my solitary meal."

"Bran is invited also. Where did you leave him?" Frances inquired. She was fond of the great deerhound who followed Quentin up and down the country. "Muddy paw-marks on the carpet are evidences of

human sympathy with canine difficulties, and therefore not objected to. I must go and look for him."

Fleming jumped up.

"No—no. I will fetch him. I have no doubt he has already ventured indoors."

He returned in a minute or two with the dog, and remarked on a pair of antlers he had noticed in the hall :

"New, are they not ? I don't recollect seeing them before."

"Melville sent them to me while we were away," Aveland replied. "I unpacked them this morning. A well-meant, yet barbarous present. Why should I wish to adorn my home with portions of my fellow-creatures ? One might as well hang up a man's ears on the walls, or utilize them as bell-pulls."

"They are grand antlers, though," said Fleming. "Where shall you put them up ?"

"Must I put them up? The Dyaks hang strings of their enemies' heads across their apartments. It appears to me that the Dyak has a better excuse than I. At least the heads were those of aggressive enemies. Your pardon, Quentin, I had forgotten your trophies at the Hall."

"Oh, you are quite right, Dr. Aveland. I acknowledge myself a civilized Dyak. Doubtless, I am reverting to some wolf-hunting ancestor when I rejoice over my ibex horns; and the wolf-hunter had the better reason—he needed the skins for clothing."

"Ah, our ancestors!" said Frances. "I rejoice greatly in being a nineteenth-century ghost. One can live in and sympathize with every century and the actors therein. I mean, one can throw oneself back to some ancestral artist-soul, and see the colours of the world; to a musician, and hear the wonders of sound; or to a

sculptor, and see the forms of things; to an alchemist, and linger over a crucible; or to some sea-rover, and set sail again as he did; and enjoy the swing of the seas all the more because the artist-soul has transmitted his eye for the green of the waves, and the sculptor his eye for their form, and the musician his ear for the dash of the surf and the whistle of the wind. Yes, it is well to be the latest-born of time. The one man I sincerely pity is Adam. I am afraid, father, you must submit to having the antlers hung somewhere within sight, otherwise poor Mr. Melville's feelings will be so hurt if he chances to come."

"And my feelings?" inquired Aveland, with a humorous glance. "Well, I give in. For a short time I pocket my convictions. I only stipulate that these remnants of my brother the stag be not flourished too conspicuously before my eyes."

Quentin turned to Frances.

"Suppose we hang them up now?" he suggested. "How about that dark corner by the hall-door? I could get them up there for you in no time. This is the sort of day to make oneself useful indoors."

It certainly was not a day to make oneself useful out of doors. The whistle of the wind had risen to a scream, and the rain beat fiercely against the windows, and through the gathering dusk one could see the white flash of foam as the waves rolled in and broke thunderously on the beach.

Wild weather makes indoor comfort the more exquisite and the more picturesque. The stone-flagged hall at Sandhayes was rather large, having originally been the common living-room of the old farm-house, for which reason it possessed a noble fire-place. This stormy afternoon the firelight glinted merrily on stone and rafter, precisely

as it had ever done since the first fire roared up the great chimney. For the Avelands had made no attempt to modernize this part of the house. They left the stone floor, dark wainscoting, and whitewashed walls as they had found them, merely adding a few black oak chairs with straight carved backs and a sideboard of the same. A fluffy white rug lay in front of the fire, giving another tone of white to be flushed by the ruddy light; and here and there stood large pots—the ordinary red garden flower-pots—full of lilies of the valley. In some subtle fashion this entrance-hall so harmonized with the country without that it seemed a part of it; so bare, so simple, yet so individual that, once seen, it could not be forgotten. It was essentially northern. Othere, the old sea-captain,

> "With a kind of laugh in his speech,
> Like the sea-tide on a beach,"

might have walked in from the gale, and

sat and warmed himself before the great fireplace without any sense of incongruity; while the leaping flames threw his shadow up among the rafters among other dancing shadows, and the scent of the lilies of the valley reminded him of the brief northern summer long ago, when, perhaps, he gathered them for some fair-haired Thora or Dagmar.

By the time Fleming had got the antlers into the middle of the floor, and a stolid stable-boy had brought a pair of steps, and Frances had found hammer and nails, there was not much daylight in the hall, so dark was the sky and so narrow the one long window by the door. But the fire made noble amends, blazing the more fiercely for the draughts that whistled through the keyhole, and swept under the massive door.

"Your lilies are sweet," said Quentin, mounting the steps, hammer in hand.

"They are fine ones, too — better than mine. Where did you get them?"

Frances was standing on the white rug, stirring the coals to yet brighter flames.

"At Aston's," she replied, naming a Woffendale nurseryman. "Was it not contemptible of us to buy instead of growing them ourselves?"

"No, I think it very reasonable. You get all the beauty without the trouble, and help a man to live besides."

"I feel convinced that to be always buying and never making is a loss somehow. I am a firm believer in planting one's own vine and one's own fig-tree, and eating of the fruit thereof. It is not the same thing to eat of the fruit of another man's vine and fig."

"No, but it's a good deal easier," said Quentin.

Whereupon they both laughed, and their laughter came pleasantly to Aveland's ears

through the half-open door of the dining-room where he sat thinking of many things, as those do who are dying and know it. For, being himself a medical man, Aveland knew the hopelessness of his own case, and could trace his own failing strength day by day. How infinitely easier it would be to part with life if he could leave Frances the wife of his old friend's son; for himself being gone, who could tell what might happen. He knew well the wide clear-sightedness and instinctive nobility of his child's mind; but he also knew that there is no clear-sightedness in respect of marriage, and noble instincts are no safeguards against the irreparable mistake of an unhappy union. If Frances did not marry Quentin Fleming, whom would she choose? It was possible that she might not marry at all, but the solitary position in which she would be left made her marriage more probable. And why should she not be happy with some

other man? There were many good fellows in the world besides Fleming. Yet Aveland, whose soul was wrapped up in his daughter, tormented himself with the fear that she would perhaps choose one not of these: one despicable, worthless, intolerable. Her father imagined himself a powerless spirit on the farther side of death, enduring the hell of beholding that beloved daughter in misery for want of his protecting presence. Harassed by these thoughts, that beat upon his mind incessantly, as the long surf beat upon the sandhills beyond his windows, the sick man watched the life around him with pathetic earnestness, secretly counting the fast diminishing months of the span allotted to him, ever hoping events might so happen that when he departed, it would be in peace. Thus he listened, well-pleased, to the young folks' voices and laughter. Then came the sound of hammering. Quentin was driving in a nail.

"That will do for one," he said, stepping down and hunting in the tool-box. "Now for another." He took out a long nail and contemplated it; the firelight throwing his magnified shadow against the white wall, like a phantom of Thor, hammer in hand.

"I do not much believe in the beauty of work. There is too much of the busy bee in these days. One thinks of butterflies with positive relief."

"'Those souls which the ancients call bees,'" said Frances, quoting Porphyry.

"Yes, but the butterfly is a soul, too, and it flies higher. It is time somebody preached the beauty of idleness. I told Paton so this afternoon, but he didn't seem to see it."

"The remark arose out of what?"

"Out of old Will Elliot's refusal to bow down before the modern idol, Sanitation."

"Oh," cried Frances, laughter sparkling in her eyes, "is the dear old man as dirty as ever? I have not heard any of the village news yet."

"He is down with lumbago, and Paton wishes to have the cottage cleaned — also Will himself. Will objects. Says he has never been washed since he was a baby, and doesn't consider it wholesome, and quotes himself, and our grandfathers generally, as proofs of the wholesomeness of dirt. I confess he makes out a strong case. As I am his landlord, Paton appealed to me, and we three argued the matter this afternoon—with no result whatever. It seems that when McKie went to see the old man this morning, Paton was there to explain his views, and McKie quite agreed as to the dirty cottage; but thought the cleaning of it should be left till Will was better, and that Will himself should be left in unwashed peace."

"I think Dr. McKie is right," said Frances. She was sitting on an oak bench by the fire, her hands loosely clasped in her lap, and Fleming's dog—who had followed his master out of the dining-room—crouched at her feet, his head on his paws. Quentin had pulled up a low stool. As for the antlers, there was plenty of time for them. It was more pleasant just now to sit and talk to Frances Aveland about old Will Elliot's idiosyncrasies.

"So do I," he said in reply, "but of course McKie was certain to back up Will against Paton. You know Paton and McKie never hit it off. Besides, Elliot is a Border man, and naturally to both McKie and Will, Paton is 'just a Southron.' It is not in human nature for a canny Scot to foregather with a Southron against one so near akin as a Borderer. Paton tells me that McKie says that 'Elliot shows a grand steadfastness; it is a real pity he is not a

Presbyterian.' Which is pure aggravation on McKie's part."

Frances laughed again.

"And of course to you as well as to Dr. McKie and old Will, Mr. Paton is 'just a Southron,' and you are preparing to back the north.'

"And are not you?"

"Yes, but it is rather hard on Mr. Paton."

"Everything is hard on somebody," returned Fleming, philosophically.

"Certainly, it would be hardest for old Will to be compelled to cleanliness. I should consider that a violation of the liberty of the subject.'

"A good many modern laws are violations of the liberty of the subject," said Fleming. "In fact, there is very little liberty left. In this case, however, the subject will not be harried because I could make things unpleasant for the harriers.

There are wheels within wheels, you see. When there are not, it is bad for those whom the outside wheels are grinding."

"Mr. Paton believes in doctors, all and sundry," said Frances. "He even believes in the modern distinguished fashionable doctor, who wishes to regulate existence—that is, other people's existence—according to his whim of the moment. We must have no religion, because that is distinctly a sign of brain-disease. We must neither eat nor drink but by order. No food or medicine to be sold unless prescribed by family physician. Patients also compelled by law to swallow said prescription whether they wish to do so or not. Scene in court: John Smith, charged with refusing to take his physic—fourteen days without option of fine. Mary Brown, similar charge with aggravated circumstances of throwing her medicine out of the window — twenty-one days."

"It is evident," said Quentin, "that under such a régime you would be a fellow-martyr with Mary Brown."

"Of course. In fact, I should get six months, as I should probably assault the physician. If," continued Frances, musingly, "old Will were doing something outrageous it would be different."

"Such as tanning hides in his front garden, for instance. As it is, there is nothing much to complain of. In these matters it is best to keep a middle course. No use either tipping the cart over the precipice or jamming it against the rock. I pointed this out to Paton when he spoke of the good of the community."

"Witches were burnt for the good of the community not so very long ago," said Frances. "I should respect the rights of the individual more than the good of the community. For one thing, it is so difficult to tell what *is* the good of the

community. I am sure it would not be for its good to be perpetually coerced or to behold coercion. That sort of thing makes slaves and tyrants. There are so many questions arising. Old Will is dirty, but happy. Is it better to be dirty and happy, or clean and miserable?"

"I should say be dirty and happy."

"I am not certain of that, except in Will's case."

"You would let him alone?"

"I would adopt Dr. McKie's compromise and clean the cottage only."

"Very well. That is settled."

Fleming rose, picked up an antler, laughed suddenly, and resumed:

"You have no idea how the old man worries Paton. He—Will, I mean—having plenty of time on his hands, solemnly spells through such books as chance sends him. Chance once sent a short history of the

Christian Fathers, who, as you know, were not renowned for devotion to the tub. Old Will now quotes them with delight and says, 'Ah, parson, them wur sensible fellows!'"

Frances laughed too.

"Tell me when the scrubbing of the cottage is to take place, and I will present Will with some of his favourite 'baccy,' to console him for the affliction of a clean house."

"Well, as the frost has broken up, to-morrow may be mild. If so, I shall come over in the morning and superintend the cleaning. It will go more smoothly if I am there. Paton generously offers to supply soap and charwomen."

"Does he? I wonder what Nina will say if he requisitions her best scrubbing-brushes! I think I had better send up some old ones. Also a hoe. I am sure the floor will need a hoe."

"I daresay it will, and we shall be grateful for the brushes. Come and look at the performance, will you not? The old man admires you greatly."

"I know he does. That is why I give him 'baccy.'"

"Do you always know a man's thoughts?" Fleming was putting up the second antler. He turned his head as he spoke, looking across the hall to where Frances sat with Bran at her feet.

"That depends on the man," she said. "For instance, I can generally guess Dr. McKie's."

"Oh, McKie!—" with good-humoured impatience, "I meant——"

"So you have got the antlers up," said Aveland, coming out of the dining-room, and Quentin's meaning remained unexplained. He stepped down and critically surveyed his work.

"Do you like them there, Dr. Aveland?"

"I like them nowhere, my dear boy, but they are better in that corner than anywhere else, because not so obtrusive."

"They suit the place, I think," said Frances. "There is a barbaric simplicity about our hall that harmonizes with antlers and weapons, only we have none of the latter."

"Say poetic simplicity," replied her father. "You picture the old-time hunter feathering his arrows by the firelight. Why not the old-time poet seeing dreams in the burning logs while the storm wars outside?—

> 'For the dreamer lives for ever,
> While the toiler dies in a day.'"

The deerhound lifted his head and growled, and Malise barked shrilly, but

apparently they both recognized the approaching footsteps, for Bran laid his head down again on his paws, while the terrier ran to the door expectantly.

CHAPTER IX.

THE visitor was McKie. He came in dripping like a water-dog from the fierce rain—a tall gaunt figure in a rough travelling coat down to his heels and a soft felt hat pulled over his ears.

Through the open door rushed clearly for a moment all the sounds of the world outside: confused voices of tumultuous spirits, elemental genii who have not yet attained to articulate speech — the hiss of the surf and clash of the shingle, the sibilant rustle of wet laurels, the dry creaking of leafless branches, and, above and over

all, the exultant shout of the sea-wind. Then the door closed and the voices blended into a confused clamour, that, like all such clamour, had nothing dissonant about it, but rather fell upon the ear as something soothing and friendly.

"It's a grand thaw," said McKie, complacently, pulling off his soaked hat and coat. "There's naething like the climate of the British Isles, particularly in the north. Neither hot nor cold, but just comfortable, and a wee glint of the sun now and then."

"Wee, indeed!" retorted Aveland, laughing, "about two hours of sunshine a week!"

"Weel, it's the mair appreciated. Miss Frances, you are bonnier than ever, if that may be. I would I were forty years younger."

"Come and sit here, Dr. McKie," patting the chair next to hers.

"Ah," taking the seat indicated, "the verra invitation tells of those forty years too many. Ye would not smile on me like that and ask me to sit next ye if I were twenty-four instead of sixty-four. But it's verra gratifying; like the scent of the rose by the auld man's path when his time for roses is o'er."

"Why, doctor, I had no idea you were a poet," said Fleming.

"It's just the occasion, lad. The man—auld or young—who would not become a poet when Miss Frances smiles on him, is a worthless loon. Weel," settling himself in his chair, "there's an auld-world cosiness about your hall, Aveland, that cheers a man's soul. Just the fireside circle, nae licht but the fire's own, and the doggies at one's feet."

It was Aveland's custom in winter thus to sit in the firelit hall as twilight fell, waiting as it were for any guest, chance

or expected; while about the house began that pleasant stir which heralds dinner.

"Ay," repeated McKie, "it cheers a man's soul. And there's the lily-scent coming out of the shadows as it does on a May night."

In McKie's voice was a tone of far-away regret and vain longing, the backward longing of a man for his youth and the blossoming thereof.

"No time like the Maytime, eh, McKie?" responded his host, "and it never returns. I doubt whether Eternity itself can restore that sense of irresponsible gladness which is ours for so short a time."

"Man!" said McKie, emphatically, "if I could but get rid of this stiffness in my bones, and pit ma curls again o'er my bald head, I'd feel that same irresponsible gladness as strongly as ever. It's just sickening to awake in the morn feeling myself a boy,

and then to look in the glass and see myself a bald-headed auld fool!"

Aveland sighed and looked at the leaping tongues of flame. McKie's spirit had not encountered such storms of fortune as Aveland's, and was better fitted to withstand them if it had. That the wind is tempered to the shorn lamb is a saying as remarkable for its mendacity as for its cheerfulness. A flash of bitterness passed over Aveland's face; then his sombre eyes lightened as he looked across the wide hearth at the two still in their Maytime, who were talking softly together.

"Never mind, doctor," said Quentin. "I once met a Lincolnshire man—capital fellow he was, too—who stoutly maintained that 'nothing matters so long as you're happy.'"

"Ma certes, laddie, but that's awful doctrine! Just think where it would lead ye."

"Who knows? Perhaps to the Fortunate Isles."

"'Look as I may into the things of life,
Mirth is the only good, the rest is naught.
If in your heart the light of love you plant,
Hell it will fear not, Heaven it will not want,'"

quoted Aveland. "Omar Khayyam is on your side, Quentin. Who are we that we should contradict Omar Khayyam?"

"Aveland, I'm surprised at ye. There's a man's wurr-r-k." McKie's North British r's became more emphatic as his earnestness increased.

"Ripples on the sand, McKie," replied his host, lazily, "ripples that the next wave obliterates. A man's thoughts will last centuries. His most toilsome work often not one. Long ago there were three schoolfellows; two of them men of action, the third a dreamer. Of the two first, one rose to be a great Minister and was murdered by order of the second, who

had become the Sheik of the Assassins. The third lived to be a Singer, singing of life and love, and of the roses scattered by the north wind. Now, centuries later, what remains of the Minister's measures or the Assassin's deeds? But to-day we read the songs of Omar Khayyam."

"I am a great admirer of literature," said McKie, sturdily, "but I have always regarded the thoughts of great men as incentives to worthy action, not persuasions to sit by the roadside lamenting."

"I was not lamenting," Fleming protested. "I was uttering most cheerful sentiments."

"And I think the Lincolnshire man was extremely sensible," said Frances.

McKie looked from one to the other.

"I'll not argue with ye. A man of my wisdom knows better than to argue with young people. It's just waste of time and breath. And Aveland backing ye up, too!

If ye were all bald-headed like me, ye'd agree with every word I say. See a knot of bald-headed men talking together and ye'll find their opinions are in harmony. It's the baldness that brings wisdom by sweeping the soul of personal vanity. Speaking of baldness reminds me, Quentin, that I met Rusholme this afternoon, and he told me your uncle intended increasing the reward offered. Is that so?"

"There has been some thought of it."

"Whether increased or not, I should doubt the reward finding the man," said Aveland. "The act was either private revenge or an attempt at robbery; probably the latter If the latter, the chances of discovering the fellow are considerably lessened. He gained nothing, so there is nothing to track him by. Blind John's recognition of a stranger's voice could hardly be relied upon, at least that is my impression. Also, even if John did find

the man whom he guided, the fact of that man crossing Wildersmoor by no means proves him to have been the murderer."

"It was verra suspicious." McKie shook his head as he said this, feeling sorely oppressed by his promise to Quentin not to mention Ulyett's name. Daily the Scotchman had groaned in spirit over the burning of that letter. He had not liked Ralph, but neither did he like Ulyett. Therefore, as a matter of abstract justice, he considered the latter ought not to escape. Ulyett's guilt McKie held clearly proven.

"It was suspicious," assented Aveland, "but many innocent acts have excited grave suspicion in similar cases."

"If the man is innocent," persisted McKie, "why can he not come forward and state fairly that he crossed the moor with Blind John? He must have seen the whole affair in the papers."

"That can hardly be expected," said Quentin, and Frances noticed the earnestness of his tone. "He may have a dozen reasons—innocent, strong, private reasons—for not wishing to own he was on Wildersmoor that night. Or he may keep quiet from the simple fear of being suspected—which he is."

Aveland put a question.

"Had your cousin any expectation of being attacked by anyone?"

"Oh, no. Not to my knowledge at least. I do not think Ralph was under the slightest apprehension of that sort."

"He was big enough to defend himself," observed McKie. "It is hard to understand how he could be struck down as he was, and with his own stick, too. Whoever did it had a strong arm, as I said at the time. It just puzzles me. Blind John is positive the man he guided was tall, but not so tall as you and your cousin, Quentin."

"When did John say that?"

"To-day. I met him on the moor, and had a talk with him."

"How can he judge of anyone's height?" this from Frances.

"By the way the voice reached his ears. He says it came level with the top of his own head."

"I daresay he is right," remarked Aveland. "A man who has lost one of his senses is difficult to deceive; he is so uncommonly sharp with the others."

McKie continued in his slow exact manner:

"Altogether, we know from John that the man he guided was educated, young, active, tall, and an Englishman; for a man born north of the Tweed would have had mair sense than to give five shillings when one would have amply satisfied."

Aveland laughed outright: "No one will contradict you there, McKie."

"The way ye fling money about is just awful," went on McKie, warming to the subject. "One wad think sixpences grew like blackberries! I'm no wishing to find fault with ye, but there's no denying ye are a wasteful nation."

He proceeded to give various instances of Southron waste, a change of conversation that was a relief to Fleming. He knew the Scotchman would keep his promise respecting the letter, yet whenever keen wits circled round that unknown companion of the blind man, Quentin felt as though any moment might bring up Ulyett's name in connection with that journey. He drew a sigh of relief when "saxpences" became the staple of McKie's discourse. "At any rate, that was over for the present," he thought, as he turned to speak to Frances. She was sitting beside him, meditatively stroking Ptolemy's silky coat. That sociable feline had no mind to remain in the dining-room

without the society of his human friends. He had followed Aveland into the hall and jumped on his mistress's lap, where he purred contentedly. Firelight is a becoming illumination. It softens wrinkles, throws grey hair into shade, warms the haggard cheeks of starvation with the glow of health; and when the illumined face is young and beautiful, then the ruddy flames tantalize with their glancing light, revealing here a delicately-moulded chin, and leaving the mouth in shadow—there deep shining eyes, and all else dimly outlined. Thus the firelight played about Frances as she sat, and Quentin looked, and thought her fairer than ever. A spirit of recklessness came over him. If Ulyett were suspected? well, there must be some if's in life. A man could not creep along like one palsied, no matter what "if" barred the way. It is "the timid who anticipate that which may never be."

By what delicate influences is thought transmitted? Ulyett's name had not been mentioned, but McKie had thought of him, and Fleming's mind tumultuously circled round him; and now Frances, still stroking the purring Ptolemy, said softly:

"Did you know that poor Jack Ulyett came to see us before he sailed?"

"No, I had not heard. When was it?"

"It was the night of the fog." She would not say "the night of the murder." The word had an ugly sound, and the dead man was Quentin's cousin. Besides, she had noticed that he did not like McKie's handling of the subject.

"We wondered how he had found his way," Frances continued. "He said he had come from the station. The road is tolerably straight, you know, and the frozen ruts guided his feet. He confessed, however, that he had used up a whole box of matches

in looking for the gate, and finally ran into the teapot. It was rather late when he came, past ten, and he apologized for the hour and for any damage he might have done to the yew. He seemed rather down-hearted. I suppose the West Coast is not a very cheerful place to live in. He said he had been bidding good-bye to everyone. We were the last. I think he would have gone on to the Vicarage, but I told him they were away. Nina was sorry to have missed him. He is rather a favourite of hers."

"Ulyett gets on well with most people. He is an easy-going good-tempered sort of fellow. By the way, his cousin Isabel is engaged to young Haslam. That is the first news I heard in Woffendale this morning."

Fleming talked on, feeling a wholly unreasonable anger against poor Jack for "making calls in the middle of the night,"

as he mentally phrased it. Here was another danger, a proof that Ulyett was on the moor that fatal evening. The visit was not only known to the Avelands, but also to the Sandhayes servants; and possibly to some of the villagers to whom he might have applied for guidance in the fog. He must have lost his way again and wandered about for three hours or so, for Blind John left him in front of North Rode station before seven o'clock, and he did not appear at Sandhayes till past ten. Perhaps he had gone to some other house on the moor? A chance word uttered by anyone, a little discussion of this and that, and Ulyett would be identified with the traveller whom public opinion regarded as Ralph's murderer. At this point of his meditations Fleming pitch-forked, as it were, his reflections to the back of his mind, there to wait till recalled. His northern fatalism came to his aid and buoyed him up, as undoubtedly it does. His spirits

rose again, his anger vanished. McKie was still busy reproving the wastefulness of the English nation, Aveland listening with a half-smile. Frances had inherited that gift for listening, and Fleming found himself, as usual, telling her all that he had heard in Woffendale that morning, all that was going on at the Works, and his various plans respecting the Wildersmoor property; while the rain, driven by the gale, beat against the long narrow window like a haunted thing striving to enter that warm quiet hall. Now and then a heavy drop fell down the wide chimney and hissed in the red heart of the fire. However, to three of those who sat by the great fireplace the beating rain brought no saddening thoughts. Only Aveland, born and cradled in southern sunshine, felt its depressing influence. To McKie it was "just saft weather," no more. To Frances and Quentin the rush of the wind's wet wings was one of the natural

sounds of Wildersmoor. Whether the rain spread a soft veiling drizzle over sandhills and moor, filling the air with freshness, or whether, as now, it swept from seawards in pale sheets of solid water, it never seemed—probably because the climate was so equable—to cause any inconvenience to the natives.

On Wildersmoor that same grey rain was a familiar presence. Its soft swish mingled with their dreams and greeted them on waking. Sunshine was linked in their minds with glittering waterdrops and floating mist; with moist warm air drawn upward from deep moss and grassy hollows, where hemlock and shining marsh-marigold grew tall and rank, and feathery meadowsweet shook its scented plumes. Hence, with whatever murmuring breath or strong crying the west wind might wail over shore and sea, its song always seemed, in the ears of those who listened, to be the song they loved most. Did any despair? Then

the rushing wings were those of the Angel of the Lord, the Sword-bearer, beneath whose shadow is the peace of Death. Did any hope? Did any love? Then the wild gale was the breath of Life, the fulness of Life—jubilant, immortal. "By Wind and Sword," swore the Scythians; by Life and Death. And these two are one.

CHAPTER X.

Dinner was over at Sandhayes. Though Frances's little rose-pink drawing-room was warm and brightly lit, they had all drifted back to the long dining-room, which was Aveland's favourite room. It always looked absolutely comfortable, and particularly so on a winter evening like this, when the firelight helped the tall scarlet-shaded lamps to throw a ruddy glow on its yellow-brown tones, making an autumn harmony.

"Our fathers' fashions are best for country life," Aveland was wont to say. "Town customs imply hurry and the presence of strangers. Here we have neither."

Therefore, the eye rested gratefully on the dark, shining surface of the table, whereon stood wine, and fruit, and coffee, the black polished oak reflecting little sparkles and gleams from glass and silver. Fleming was sitting at the piano. He had been singing—possessing a fine voice, as became his Norse ancestry. Frances had moved to the sea-window, and drawn aside the curtain to look out into the night. The rain did not beat so loudly now against the house. The crying voice without was dying away in gusty sobbings, as though exhausted by fruitless effort, and minded to flee away seaward, there to rest with all forgotten things, whether bones or jewels. This being so, it was possible that Nina Paton and her husband might come in on their way home from Riverton. Aveland and McKie were by the fireplace, in a deep discussion and two arm-chairs.

"Ye are wrong about the Meigle stones," said McKie.

"You see, Quentin," said Aveland, "we are still throwing stones at each other."

"But if you cannot agree, what is the use of arguing?" This practical inquiry came from Frances.

"That observation, my dear, is full of the deepest wisdom. Unhappily, the less chance there is of men agreeing, the more they wrangle."

"It is verra certain that Arthur's kingdom should be placed much farther north than it usually is," said McKie, earnestly.

"No use looking to me for assistance, doctor," said Fleming, rising; "I'd rather leave Arthur down south, considering the character given him in the ballad:—

"'When good King Arthur ruled this land,
He was a goodly king;
He stole three pecks of barley-meal,
To make a bag-pudding!'"

"There's another proof!" cried McKie, triumphantly. "The auld ballad preserves tradition. Nae doubt the pudding was haggis! I'll forgive ye for laughing; laughter canna alter facts. The pudding was haggis! Mercy on us! What's that? Is it yon parson?"

"That" was a loud double knock at the front door, and, as McKie surmised, it heralded Cyril Paton and his wife.

"This is truly noble of you, Nina," said Frances, assisting her friend out of a cloud of wrappings.

"Cyril said you would never expect us on such a night, but I told him I understood Wildersmoor better than that."

"Well," said Paton, emerging from a rain-soaked coat, "it appeared to me unreasonable, not to say unfriendly, to bring two muddy people into your house at this time of night without provocation."

The Vicar was a good-looking man,

rather stout, with a full brown beard that he cherished exceedingly, a pleasant manner, a clear fine voice. Regarding him critically, his wife's idea of a bishopric for him seemed appropriate. The episcopal dignity would become him, and, being a kindly man, he would use it no worse than others, perhaps better.

"We gave the provocation of inviting you," said Aveland.

"I think I must have come even if you had not asked us, Dr. Aveland." Nina's grey-blue eyes brightened as she spoke. "I sorely need mental refreshment after a dose of missionary and muffins. How delightful your rooms always look! Mine are hopelessly modern. Don't repeat anything I say, Dr. McKie. But I know you will not. Nor you, Mr. Fleming. Sandhayes is my confessional, and my remarks are privileged."

"What have you been doing at River-

ton?" asked Quentin. "One of the regulation church tea-fights? Sometimes I help at them. You should see me cutting the cake. Two slices for each person; a third when the recipient is under twenty."

"I wish you had been there. I only got one piece. It was very good. Not so the address."

Paton did not hear his wife's remark. "We had a most interesting account of missionary work in West Africa," he observed to the world in general, after warmly greeting Fleming, who, as a good Churchman, a large landowner with the Atlas Works at his back, and a young man, was precious indeed—and rightly so—in the Vicar's eyes.

"Well, Cyril, it seems to me that these missions expend a quite terrible amount of toil with almost infinitesimal results. I am inclined to think that one reason of the comparative failure is the want of energetic

spinsters to go among the women. The poor wives of the missionaries have enough to do in that climate to look after their own and their husbands' health. Also, the natives are not sufficiently impressed. It is my belief that if Maskelyne and Cooke were sent out with a detachment of suitable spins, they would convert more of Africa in six months than all the missions in twenty years. Their tricks would beat the Voodoo doctors all to nothing."

"That is a grand idea, Mrs. Paton," said McKie. "It's a real pity it canna be tried. It would be fighting the Evil One with his ain weapons."

The Vicar drew himself up, and stroked his beard while he meditated reproof. He was annoyed both with his wife and with McKie; more particularly with McKie, whose aggressive independence of thought and speech jarred every fibre of Paton's being. Naturally, he held that upon matters

connected with his profession no outsider had any right to express an opinion. This is a mental attitude shared by the other professions. Ninety-five doctors out of every hundred deny the right of any being to have ideas respecting maladies or treatment of maladies, even his own, or upon any question connected with their guild. As for law, observe to a lawyer that most law is in direct antagonism to common sense and common justice, and he will reply, "It is the law," much as an old Greek might have said, "Yonder shadow in the path is the great god, Pan—horns, hooves, and all. Worship him." It is useless to point out that neither Pan nor the law was ever anything but a fancy, an opinion of this or that generation. It is the god Pan. That is enough; there is no more to be said. In short, neither our souls nor our bodies are any concern of ours, and as for our minds, we have no right to use them.

So the argumentative combative turn of McKie's mind was not agreeable to Paton. But the North Briton was as prickly to handle as his national emblem, therefore the Vicar preferred to administer a reproof obliquely.

"My dear Nina, jesting on these subjects——"

Here Aveland struck in—

"Never mind, Paton, Sandhayes gives sanctuary to all erratic opinions, as the Church gave it to those individuals who disturbed their neighbours' minds, either by reason of the refugees' just rights or their inherent crookedness."

"Sanctuary was not extended to scoffers," said Paton.

McKie rushed to battle with a snort.

"The Church was verra hospitable. She never grudged a good fire wherewith to warm the scoffer."

"Now, doctor," interposed Quentin,

seeing wrath in the Vicar's eye, "you know very well that the little failing to which you so unkindly allude is merely an unfortunate weakness of human nature. Everybody burns, or would like to burn, those who do not agree with them. Nobody likes to be contradicted. Nero burnt the Christians; then the Christians burnt each other. The Puritans set up a howl about the persecutions they suffered—and whipped Quakers when they got out to New England. Our modern unbelievers would burn us believers if they could. No one can doubt that who observes their rabid bitterness against the Christian faith. Human nature, McKie, not the Church. One can hardly help persecuting a man for his religious or non-religious opinions; they are so annoying."

"Quentin, if ye had lived in earlier times ye'd have been a Crusader, harrying other folks' homes in the name of the Lord."

"And what would you have been?" retorted Fleming. "A Border chieftain, lifting your neighbours' cattle in the name of Buccleugh."

McKie's rugged features relaxed into a smile.

"I'll no contradict ye. Those must have been grand times!"

Frances raised her straight black brows. "Hear him!—Dr. McKie regretting that he cannot plunder the fowl-house and empty the stables!"

"Dr. McKie must permit me," said the Vicar, who had recovered his good-humour, "to protest against his assertion that the Church of England is a persecuting church. Errors of judgment must occur in everything worked by man, but tolerance has always been her distinguishing characteristic. It is her reasonableness that continually excites animosity. Men complain she is not sufficiently this or that, forgetting

that she is the Church of the Nation, not of any one particular sect in it."

"That is true," Aveland agreed. "I think there is more liberty of private thought and action in our Church than in any other religious community."

"Weel, I am willing to acknowledge that it's better to be priest-ridden than doctor-ridden, and ye stand mair chance of the latter now-a-days. It is not the Church I am so set against as — putting yourself and a few others aside, Mr. Paton— her loons o' ministers. However, I'll say nae mair just now, save that ye are mistaken when ye call me a scoffer, for that I am not."

"Nor I," said Nina. "Really, Cyril, I was not scoffing. I was seriously reflecting on the blacks' welfare. Now I will restrict my remarks to the whites. How fearfully heavy the Rusholmes are! One never knows what to say to the girls. They

were both at the Riverton meeting to-night. Isabel fortunately absorbed in her fiancé. But the other one, Esmé, persisted in sitting close beside me and telling me how fond she was of North Rode, and how she used to stay at the Vicarage in the old Vicar's time. On my other side, Mrs. Holt chimed in as a sort of echo. Esmé appeared to be more with Mrs. Holt than with her own people."

"I daresay they came together," said Quentin. "Mrs. Holt is fond of Esmé. She is a good deal at my uncle's."

"Well, finally, Mr. Crosier took her away to look at an assegai, or antbear, or something of that sort. Then my last state was worse than my first, for I fell into Mrs. Holt's clutches without hope of rescue. What a depressing woman she is! I hope I do not hurt your feelings, Mr. Fleming? She is not a relative of yours, I believe."

"Oh no. None whatever. Mrs. Holt

is simply my uncle's sister-in-law, his late wife's sister."

"So I understood. Well, every time I have met her she has impressed upon me her desire to depart to another and a better world; yet from all I have seen of her I am convinced she would feel horridly uncomfortable in any other country, to say nothing of another world."

"Ah," said Aveland, who had just finished a three-cornered discussion with McKie and the Vicar, "Mrs. Holt is a wise woman. To be happy one must either be intensely moral or entirely without morals. Either extreme brings peace. Mrs. Holt has attained to the first-mentioned Nirvana."

Paton looked grave.

"Mrs. Holt is an excellent woman," said he.

"Precisely. And nothing else. Are my observations too riotous for you, Paton?

If so, I apologize. We will have some more music. It is supposed to be soothing. I have always felt it exactly the reverse."

"Do you mean you dislike it?"

"No. Quite the contrary. My complaint is that it brings too vividly before one the eternal unrest and disappointment of life. You may soar on 'Song's bright pinions,' and you do. But you come back to earth with a thud that leaves your bones aching. The human voice is no anodyne, Paton. It may be heaven. It more often is hell. But it is never sleep. Fleming was singing a fine Russian thing before you came in. Perhaps he will repeat it."

It was a melody of the steppes, a love-song, wherein the lover's words are ever and anon swept from his lips by the icy wind as the sleigh rushes over the frozen snow beneath the stars. Fleming sang the song well, as though feeling the exhilaration of the swift rush through the keen wind,

the holding in of the tearing horses, the wild loneliness of the desolate plain, the intoxicating companionship of the muffled figure beside him.

"Ye sing it like some auld Viking on the edge of a fight," said McKie, approvingly, as the last chords were struck. "I can hear the whicker o' the sword through the notes. It is just amazing how love-making and fighting go together. The one always reminds of the other."

"Very good—very," observed the Vicar, placidly. "Nowadays there is a great demand for these—er—folk-songs. They are certainly impressive."

"Because they are elemental," said Aveland. "No music appeals so powerfully to mankind as the ballads wherein the mighty trinity—Love, Life, and Death, call to the world to listen."

"There are better ballads in Scotland," said McKie.

Quentin laughed.

"That's right, doctor. Stand up for the North."

Frances took up her violin.

"I will not ask you to sing, Nina. I know your ideas of entertainment are Oriental."

"They are," assented Mrs. Paton. "I always sympathize with that Rajah who asked the cricketers why they did not hire somebody to do the running. I am very grateful to anyone who will do the running. What are you going to play?"

"Anything you like."

"Why not these Hungarian Dances?" suggested Quentin, turning over a pile of music. "They remind me a little of those Slavonic things Sarasate played that day we heard him. Do you remember?"

"As if I could forget what Sarasate played! Yes, I remember. The notes flew out like sparks. He is a magician;

he is the Pied Piper. We heard him twice, Nina."

"Did you all three go? I wish I had been with you."

"I only ran up to town in time for the last concert," said Quentin.

The Vicar looked mildly surprised.

"I thought, Miss Aveland, that you did not care for concerts."

"Quite right, Mr. Paton, I do not. I agree with the gipsies, who believe music should only be heard out of doors. But when the Pied Piper plays, one would thankfully listen to him in a coal-cellar, or at a greater depth. I have no doubt he would play Cerberus asleep, and 'that grim Ferryman whom poets speak of' would row him across without demanding the customary obolus."

Paton turned to his wife.

"We must really hear this violinist the next time we are in town, Nina."

"Yes, dear," Nina responded, with unusual meekness. She did not dare to confess that when they had last gone up to London, she had excused herself from accompanying her husband to a dismal entertainment at the house of a relative, hastening, instead, to dream under the spell of the enchanter for two brief hours.

"Frances and I managed to time our stay so that we heard him twice," observed Aveland. "My remarks as to the disturbing influence of music do not apply to his, which is infinitely soothing in its magic; but then, it is not the human voice. It is a sound of wood and air, of the wind in the forest, of singing pines and rustling grass, and, as Frances says, it leads to Fairyland. Did you ever notice, Paton, those singular verses of the ballad of Thomas the Rhymer, in which the way to Elfland is described? Three paths are

pointed out: that of Righteousness, beset with thorns; that of Evil, running broad and smooth across a lilied lea; and that to Fairyland, over a ferny brae, the only one which is wholly pleasant both in the treading and the end of the journey. There is a deal in that old ballad, Paton. The deepest peace is found on that fairy route, along that ferny brae. No, do not speak of the narrow path. Its end, doubtless, is peace, but the thorns are sharp and rankle. There are no thorns on the ferny brae, and the sun is always shining. There are Pan and the Dryads. There stands Nausicaa, and Argus finds his master. And the Douglas comes to life again on Otterbourne. Believe me, Paton, this world will never be anything but a modified hell, and is only supportable because that Fairyland exists; a fair and gracious realm into which one may escape at any moment and find rest.

The Vicar was a cultivated man, an educated man in the olden sense of the word. Therefore, when culture appealed to him, he responded like a harp-string when another is struck close by.

"You echo Marlow," he said, and quoted the lines:

"'Have I not made blind Homer sing to me?
And hath not he that built the walls of Thebes
With ravishing sound of his melodious harp,
Made music with my Mephistopheles?
Why should I die then? Basely why despair?'"

"That is verra grand, and ye say it weel," said McKie, forgetting his dislike of the Vicar in his admiration of the dead giant whose words Paton quoted. Nay, he even felt some slight warming of heart towards the man who spoke Marlow's lines with such evident appreciation.

"Mind is the ruling power now-a-days," said Paton. His wife did not agree.

"Ah, no, Cyril. People may talk as they please about the supremacy of mind

over matter, but so long as mind cannot get rid of matter, it seems to me that matter has generally the best of it. To be really a king, one must either be a supreme genius, ruling men centuries after death by sheer force of individuality, or else an Eastern monarch. Ruling hearts, indeed! Pooh!—what is that compared to the power of cutting off a man's head at a minute's notice? He may change his opinions a dozen times a day, but he cannot put his own head back again. Where then, is your supremacy of mind?"

"Even then, Nina, you would not be ruling the man's sentiments," said Frances.

"No, but I should have deprived him of the power of expressing them," replied Nina.

"He might rise up and express them hereafter, with comments upon the manner of his muzzling here," Aveland suggested.

"Ah, that undiscovered country! How it checks one at every turn. The Borgias were the only absolutely free men of modern times. In Alexander and Cæsar one beholds unshackled highly-cultivated human nature; minds unprejudiced, unbiassed, appreciative, perfectly untrammelled. How beautiful the sight!"

"They were monsters," said Paton. "Let us be thankful we shall not see their like again."

"Shall we not?"—it was Aveland who spoke. "I am not so sure. The conditions of our civilization are becoming favourable to the development of the type. But when Cæsar Borgia reappears, he will not belong to your profession, my dear Paton, but to mine."

"I am glad of that," replied the Vicar, with some emphasis, and they all laughed. Then the fantastic sparkling Hungarian melodies leapt out from Frances' violin.

When they ceased, more songs followed, McKie petitioning for Mary Stuart's Lament.

"That is pairfect," he said with a sigh as the notes ceased. Whether he had been listening to the voice then singing it, or to voices that had sung it long ago, who can tell? Ghosts gather thickly in the pathway as the years roll on.

"It is perfect," Nina agreed. "Cyril, I am afraid it is getting late."

"Not yet," said Aveland. "It is not much past eleven."

"Ma certes!" ejaculated McKie. "Quentin, I'll never catch that twelve train at Wildersmoor. I'd better take the train here instead of driving with ye."

"Oh, I'll get you there in time. If we miss it, I'll put you up at the Hall. Mrs. Paton, I will drive you and the Vicar home, if you will permit me."

"It is too good of you, Mr. Fleming.

I should be truly thankful. But shall we not cause Dr. McKie to miss his train?"

But McKie had become reckless.

"Never mind me, Mrs. Paton. I'll be snug enough at the Hall."

"We will take care of him if you forget to call for him on your way back," said Frances.

"Ye can forget me, Quentin," McKie called promptly after Fleming, as he went out laughingly replying that he was not very likely to forget to call at Sandhayes.

Nina had not much chance of conversing with Quentin as she sat beside him in the dog-cart, for the rain was now falling in quiet steady sheets, and her mind was chiefly occupied with keeping her umbrella well over herself, Fleming having refused any portion of it, saying he was as accustomed to a wetting as a sea-gull.

"This weather is positively awful," she exclaimed, as they rattled up the silent

village street and the rain took a fresh innings and poured down more pitilessly than ever.

"Capital for the land," said Quentin, with a landowner's instinct. "I hope you are not getting very wet, Mrs. Paton?"

"Not at all, thanks. I hear my husband asking your groom where he goes to church."

"Do you? I am afraid Smith does not go anywhere. The metropolitan splendours of Woffendale generally attract him on Sundays."

"Do you go there every day?"

"To Woffendale? Yes, but I get home early as a rule, generally to lunch. To-morrow I shall be dining with my uncle. Here we are. Let me help you down."

CHAPTER XI.

Mrs. Paton drew off her gloves slowly and thoughtfully as she stood before the fire in the Vicarage drawing-room, while the sound of the retreating dog-cart died away.

"Extremely lucky for us that Fleming happened to be at Sandhayes," observed her husband, warming his hands. "By the way, you were rather uncharitable in the way you spoke of the Rusholmes, and they are old friends of his."

"I assure you, Cyril, he did not mind in the least, and I wished to put before him the impression that odious girl Esmé

makes upon a civilized individual like myself."

"She may simply desire to be more friendly with you."

"She simply desires to marry Quentin Fleming. She meant to marry Ralph, but he was killed. Now she is turning her attention to his cousin."

"Well," said Paton, with serene obtuseness, "she would make him a good wife."

"My dear Cyril! she would make him perfectly wretched. The man has a thousand aspirations with which Esmé Rusholme's diminutive soul and illiterate mind could never sympathize. He would sink into a morose disappointed creature. He is too good for that. She only wants the money and position he could give her."

"Surely the Rusholme girls will have money."

"Not wealth such as Esmé could obtain

by marrying an exceptionally rich man like Quentin Fleming. He is even a better match now than he was, for no doubt old Mr. Fleming will leave him the money that would have been Ralph's. Altogether," continued Nina, "I am very deeply interested in the situation, and I wish you were too, Cyril."

The Vicar yawned.

"It is seldom wise, my dear, to concern ourselves with our neighbours' affairs, and I am not sure that Fleming would like it."

Nina laughed. This idea really amused her.

"Oh, Mr. Fleming and I never quarrel. He is not the sort of man one quarrels with. Besides, I do not intend to meddle. I shall merely invite Esmé here so that she may have every opportunity of marrying Travis Crosier. He admires her, and is admirably suited to her. If she marries him, she will do no harm. He is an amiable ordinary

man who will ultimately drift into a secluded parsonage where Esmé can lecture the villagers, and perhaps even do some good. Villages are the proper spheres for women of that type. In stormy centres of life they usually act as wreckers."

"This is merely your imagination, Nina."

"No, I have no imagination, wish I had. Anyone can see that Quentin Fleming is in love with Frances, and no wonder."

"It may be as you say. She is an exceedingly beautiful girl. I could wish that her father were less easy-going, less imbued with these lax modern notions. It would be much to be regretted if Fleming were influenced towards views such as Dr. McKie's, for instance."

Nina paused a moment before she replied,

"I am sure that both Dr. Aveland and Dr. McKie are sincerely religious men,

Cyril. I do not see that they have any lax notions. What makes you think so?"

"I mean that I consider them both opposed to authority; self-opinionated, in fact."

"So were those old prophets who retired into the desert and thought for themselves, and——"

Here the Vicar interrupted.

"Nowadays every man imagines himself a prophet. If he can hardly spell his own name, he can at least kick the parson."

Under provocation—in this instance it was the lingering remembrance of McKie's provocation—Paton occasionally developed a lay freedom of speech and a swift hitting of the nail on the head, that made one's heart warm towards him. Nina looked at her husband with approving eyes. She liked him best in his lay moods.

"I am sure, dear, nobody at Sandhayes wishes to kick the parson. If Frances marries Mr. Fleming, as I hope she will, you

will find him inclined to do more, not less, on the Church's behalf. When a man is happy, he is disposed to be generous, and Frances would not check him. She does not interfere in anything unless she has some serious reason for so doing. Besides, she and I have always been good friends. Whereas Esmé Rusholme would take good care that not a moment of Mr. Fleming's time, or a penny of his money, was bestowed upon anything that she did not superintend, or upon anybody who did not defer to her in all things. She has the soul of a petty tyrant, cringing when down, insupportable when up. It would be quite a misfortune for us if she were Mrs. Fleming. There are a thousand ways in which she could make things disagreeable for us in Woffendale, and I am positive she would. She is civil to me now because she wishes to visit North Rode and hopes I shall invite her, which I shall, though not for her reason. But she is one

of those women who dislike other women, and who let them know it if ever they get the upper hand."

The Vicar shook his head. He did not agree with his wife's opinion of Esmé Rusholme, which he ascribed to prejudice. But when Nina spoke of the friendship between herself and Frances, and of the antagonism between herself and Esmé, then he did listen to his wife's remarks. Hitherto he had not paid much attention to the friendly feeling existing between Nina and Sandhayes. Now it began to assume importance. If Nina could agree with Frances Aveland, and was resolved not to agree with Esmé Rusholme—the Vicar professed utter disbelief in natural aversions, though he himself had as many as an average Christian could comfortably manage—why, under these circumstances it would be obviously better that Mrs. Fleming's name should be Aveland rather

than Rusholme. Possibilities began to dawn on Paton's mind. His brow cleared as he reflected that Nina would probably have more influence over Frances when the latter's father was dead; and possibly that unpleasant North Briton, McKie, might not be so perpetually at the Hall when its master was married. It is but just to the Vicar to state that his anxiety to keep Fleming in the steady church-going habits of his forbears was not wholly for any advantage to himself. He depended upon Quentin's co-operation for the carrying out of several excellent schemes in the parish. Also, he hoped for more work in the future. There was little to do among the quiet fisher-folk of North Rode and the neighbouring farmers. There was much to do in noisy smoky Woffendale. If Paton could not comprehend and sympathize with those whose views differed from his own, that is a defect common to most people;

he had at least the merit of being thoroughly in earnest and devoted to his work. It was but natural that he should picture himself—backed by Quentin Fleming—transferred to a Woffendale living, becoming better known, well spoken of by those whose speech is considered by their fellows, till — well, Cyril Paton rarely acknowledged his ambitions even to himself, but why should not a man hope for the prizes in his profession? Why is a parson expected to scorn all advancement for himself? If he really does so, he becomes an enthusiast, and is a burning and a shining light, or a Will-o'-the-wisp, as the case may be. There was no enthusiasm about the Vicar of North Rode; but he possessed a certain pig-headed goodness that won him respect, and a settled conviction of his own wisdom that would prove extremely serviceable to him when he reached the episcopal dignity.

"You say Crosier admires Esmé Rusholme," said Paton, after some minutes' silence. "Well, her money would be a help to him. She is sure to have some. It is growing late, my dear. Is the house shut up?"

So Nina knew that her words had made an impression. She was right in her judgment of Esmé Rusholme. For Esmé was dangerous by reason of her narrow sympathies, her small vindictive soul. Happily Providence had not bestowed upon her much mental capacity, therefore she was less harmful than she might have been. Yet no evil thing, however stupid, is powerless for evil. Many years, much labour, strong thought and deep feeling, go to the building of one cathedral. And the biggest fool upon earth can put a torch to it.

Sandhayes was the centre of several people's thoughts that night.

"Quentin," said McKie, as the dog-cart turned into a wide moorland track, whitish-grey through the darkness and sweeping rain, and the lights of the old farmhouse disappeared from sight, "Quentin, Aveland is fairly cheerful, but he'll no last long. That's a bonny lass for a father to leave alone in the world. Mercy on us!" as a small rivulet dashed down the nape of his neck, "I'm thinking I'll accept your offer, lad, and stay at the Hall to-night. I'm in no mind for a railway journey after this."

"All right, doctor. How about your patients? Nobody will know where you are."

"I am a clever man, Quentin, so they'll do verra well without me. Haven't ye heard that there is a great difference between a good and a bad doctor, but verra little between a good doctor and none at all?"

Quentin laughed.

"And where is your big doggie?" continued McKie. "It's an ill night for the poor beastie to be running ahint."

"He's tucked up on the back seat with Smith. I thought he might be tumbling into a moor-pool if I let him run in all this."

"That's weel. I was about to counsel ye to leave him at Sandhayes."

They drove on through the storm. Quentin's thoughts back in the ruddy-lighted room at Sandhayes, and the thoughts were fair and pleasant ones. None could regret Dr. Aveland's ill-health more than the son of his old friend. Fleming had a very great respect and personal liking for Frances' father independently of the fact that he was her father. But when a man has been ailing for a long time, his most intimate friends seldom realize the approach of the end. True, McKie's opinion was a valuable one. Yet he might be mistaken

Aveland might live some years longer. And Fleming had shadows of his own to face, grim phantoms that might at any time take form and shape worse than honourable death. So that when the reaction had taken place, and from gloom his spirits had risen to their former level, it was only natural that he should not pay much attention to McKie's melancholy prophecy. So he laughed as he drove on, thinking of happiness; and far off, on the hot dank West Coast, Jack Ulyett looked towards the north-west and saw and heard—not the dry dusty palms, the bare squalor, the monotonous maddening beating of the tom-toms, but the rime-laden quaintly-clipped yews at the gate of Sandhayes, the chill white blanket of the mist, the roll and swish of the strong cold Irish sea.

END OF VOL. I.

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